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IN SEARCH OF
A PERSONAL CREED

By the Same Author

A MUSICAL PILGRIM'S
PROGRESS

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Theology

IN SEARCH OF A PERSONAL CREED

BY

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FOREWORD

THIS little book is intended for men and women who want to find out what the central convictions are that make up a Christian view of life, and to discover whether or not those convictions are their own personal convictions. It is not likely to be of much use to anyone who is in a state of willingness to be told what to believe. But it makes an effort to meet those who are seriously anxious to be aware of what they do believe about life, and the world, and man, and God, when they use their sense of truth to the uttermost. It is an important thing to know what one's creed really is. Many accept a Christian creed (at Confirmation, for example), and many reject any such creed, without ever having come in sight of the question of what they themselves actually believe and what disbelieve.

The substance of this book was prepared in part-response to a demand that suddenly and spontaneously became articulate in a group of young people. It was a demand for help in the business of thinking out the essentials of the Christian position and systematising their own personal beliefs towards some sort of creed, formulated or unformulated. Along with it, in the background, was manifest a feeling that the

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church to which they belonged should attempt a restatement of faith. The demand came as rather a surprise, but the rightness of it grew clearer, and the force of it seemed to be very urgent. It links up with other symptoms in various quarters of the same kind of pressure. Most Christian people are in a state of virtual creedlessness at the present time. There has been much growth and change in the last generation or two, changes not merely on particular points of belief, but some transformation in shape, colour, and lines of force of the body of faith. The old credal standards no longer represent anyone, Fundamentalist or Modernist. (Even one who would not definitely dissent on any single point of doctrine would no longer set forth his faith in the same form if he were starting afresh; the emphasis would fall differently.) Yet the only way in which the change is registered is in relation to these standards of the past—it is measured by their diminished validity for us. That is to say, growth is recognised only in its negative aspect; as if Christians to-day believed less, when rather it is a sense of the expansion of belief that we have. We don't read the older utterances with a feeling of gentle regret, like some sceptic saying, "How beautiful that is! I wish I could believe it." Rather, there is much that means nothing to us, and probably some that we should repudiate, with thankfulness that God has brought us to believe worthier and more glorious things of His nature

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and His will. The growth that has taken place has come through sincere seeking into truth; it has come through fuller knowledge of the universe and the creative process; it has come through more vivid and sympathetic studies of Jesus Christ; and it has come through a more quick and tender conscience about the burdens of our brethren, and the Christian task in the world. Such growth is upwards, and into the light. Yet the churches, with their outdated standards, allow their ministers, and still more their rank and file, to labour under the confused and depressed *morale* of men continually giving ground and fighting a retreating fight.

Certainly, there is the most urgent and vital need for credal restatement by the churches. The standards of the past were, some of them, great utterances in their day. We don't, however, honour them by retaining them nominally, and giving them a lingering and diminished homage, but rather by seeking, on the same high level of seriousness, to enunciate the convictions that are dynamic and creative in us. The church with a living message for this age needs not only tattered banners, however venerable, but such colours as her members can march under.

It is true that the best feeling of our time would be all against any effort to make new creeds if the word suggests, as it is apt to do, the attempt to draw a line separating the sheep from the goats, and *delimiting* truth. Any such

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attempt, we realise, must be guilty of a false lucidity and a false finality, and it must depend on an external authority of some kind, such as we no longer desire to enthrone, nor want men to accept unquestioningly and uncritically.

If, for these reasons, the word "creed" should be regarded with suspicion and misgiving, "manifesto" or "confession of faith" might be a better term. Anyhow, the day is never past for frank and free and fearless declaration, in our own tongue and after our own forms of thought, of the convictions that are actually operative in us. The attempt to formulate them might well be, not a divisive activity, but a unifying one, as, for example, the Copec Commission No. 1, on "The Nature of God and His Purpose for the World," so notably found it. It would do something to banish the miserably confused and depressed and controversial atmosphere that comes of letting growth and enlargement be officially recognised and generally discussed only in their negative aspect, and leaving many Christian people to be tormented by a false conflict of loyalties between faith and sense of truth. Not least, it would give the churches' witness to the world a better chance of "touching the nerve of reality."

This, of course, is the task and responsibility of the various branches of the church. But, until it has been taken up and carried through, it comes back all the more on individuals to think out their own position, and know by

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virtue of what convictions they can call themselves Christians, or, by failure of what convictions, not Christians. And, in any case, it is only out of such individual work that there can emerge a common body of living belief, fit to be the Manifesto or Confession of Faith of a Christian Church in our own place and time.

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I

THE NATURE AND CONDITIONS OF THE SEARCH

IT is possible to start a search of this kind from the top or from the bottom. That is to say, you might start with existing creeds and doctrines and find out whether you were going to adopt them or discard them ; or how they would have to be pruned and modified and reshaped to represent you. That is a patchy way of going to work for so momentous an undertaking. It is the most that a great many people ever attempt, but it is apt to take on the character of a negative, destructive process. Very often it is abandoned in a panic for that reason. The seeker begins to realise how much there is that he is not sure of ; he becomes aware of cracks as soon as he starts scratching the surface ; he is afraid to explore and find out how deeply they extend ; he gives up the hope of finding solid ground he can jump on with both feet, and probably thereafter regards as "unsettling" and "dangerous" anything which would set the questioning process going again, or anyone who wants to apply the

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touchstone of reality, because he is haunted by a suspicion that there are no foundations at all.

The alternative plan is to start from the bottom. If it works at all it will work in a positive, constructive way. Every step will be so much gained. Descartes had to go down as far as "I think, therefore I am" before he found a bedrock starting-point. That was in order to get a philosophical certainty of a very high order; just as for some scientific instruments an extraordinarily stable foundation must be secured. For your own private and practical working faith you may not need to be so drastic. But you must go down, till you come to perceptions and judgments which honestly you don't need to go behind, and which will stand all the weight you can put upon them, and then build up, bit by bit, as you come face to face with the meaning of your convictions, and find what follows from them and what they point towards.

That is the method we propose to follow here. There are some things that have to be said about it.

1. Obviously the search must be your own individual search. Nobody else can do it for you. The most that this little effort, for example, can do, is to conduct you to the places where, in one personal experience, certain judgments have been made, certain convictions have been born. It remains for you to find whether the same thing happens in your case.

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The book, in any case, must go on, where you perhaps remain behind, or diverge to the one side or the other. Your own beliefs may crystallise out by agreement or disagreement when you accompany someone else through the various "valleys of decision." In either case they will be your own. It cannot be too strongly put to you that your creed is in yourself, and that the task is to discover what you yourself believe. You may say, "I'm a fool. I'm not used to thinking about the great ends and meanings of life. I wouldn't dream of trusting my own judgment." You may go about, as so many of us do, explicitly or implicitly asking writers of books and preachers of sermons and friends, "Can *you* tell me? What do *you* feel?" But there are convictions which you ought not to take at second-hand, and which, as a matter of fact, you can't really take at second-hand, however you may assume them nominally. Books and teachers and advisers can take you to the place where the issue lies. They can make sure you have the material before you. They can try to give you a straight view of the facts. But there comes a point when everything depends on a judgment or a response that is authentic and authoritative in as far as it is utterly and absolutely your own. Thus, for example, two men may profoundly and sincerely take opposite views on the question of vivisection. There will then be a scope and a need for reading and discussion and advocacy, because it is likely that they are looking at different parts of the

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field of fact—each of them has a selected, and possibly distorted, view. It ought, theoretically, to be a mere matter of time and proof and willingness to know the truth, to clear the issue of that cause of difference. Wherever either is mistaken he can be proved to be mistaken—he can *be told*. But suppose that point is reached—suppose both have before them the same field of fact, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, then there might come into sight a difference that was fundamental and, for the time being, final. One of them might say, “Rather than use animals in this way, I believe it would be the highest right to let a human being die.” And the other, on that identical issue, feel exactly the opposite. Each has got down to a conviction behind which he can’t go, and it is something all his own; it can’t be proved or disproved; it can’t be given or taken away by mere telling or being told.

Your creed must be composed of convictions that have that quality, and of what follows from them. Your unconscious creed (if you haven’t got a conscious one) is resting upon them at this moment. It remains for you to know what you believe, to get down to the point where the convictions are born, and to be sure that they’ve arisen out of as clear and full a view of reality as you can get, and that you haven’t made false deductions from them.

Perhaps this seems to put an intolerable responsibility on yourself, and your own judg-

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ment—you being only a youngster and rather a fool and so on, as aforesaid. But you can't in any case evade it. If someone tries, for example, to unload it on the Bible, and believes things "for the Bible tells me so," he must have first faced the responsibility of making such a tremendous judgment about the Bible. The grounds on which he could do it would be just that its greatest truths appealed so irresistibly to his own personal sense of truth, or perhaps because others had taken it as their authority; and in that case he has made, on his own responsibility, a momentous judgment about the life and character of those others.

Or if someone entrusts his conscience to a church, and is willing to believe what he is told to believe on its authority, he must have ventured to judge the church worthy of such a trust.

We haven't, therefore, escaped the responsibility of personal judgment when we delegate the authority to something or someone outside us whom we appoint as absolute and infallible Sovereign. We made that appointment. If we go far enough back we may discover the judgment or conviction that led us to make it. All we have done is to make a false leap from that judgment or conviction. Because some great moral utterance of a prophet, or some penetrating saying of Jesus Christ, found echo and assent in our conscience or insight, we were not justified in declaring that everything bound up within the covers of the same book should be absolute

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truth for us, with or without the agreement of our own reason and conscience. We had no right to sign away our personal judgment, and abandon the powers given us by God for knowing the truth. In spite of ourselves we can't really do it. Even for one who holds to the inerrancy of the Scriptures, a page from the book of Joshua or a genealogical table has not the same quality of truth as the Sermon on the Mount.

Your creed must be your own. Not only does it go back in any case to an ultimate authority in yourself, but it should consist only of what genuinely has the backing of your own sense of truth. Otherwise it will be terribly vulnerable and unstable; you'll have to keep it up, instead of its supporting you.

2. If we are simply asked to know what we ourselves feel to be most true and most real, the great and plain demand on us is for sincerity. Well, of course we'd all declare ourselves sincere. But sincerity is not too common and not too easily come by. It is a quality sufficiently rare in art, for example—in painting, writing, music—to be notable, and to put out of countenance, where it does exist, a great deal of other work. Sincerity means a direct response from our self to reality. It is hampered or prevented in two ways, by what we might call muffling and by what we might call distortion.

Muffling means that our real self isn't getting out. Our own voice isn't being heard, except as

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it might come through a smothering of blankets. A certain nakedness of spirit is needed, and we're apt to assume we've stripped down to it when we're still swathed from head to foot in borrowed views and poses and unexamined judgments, which we instinctively defend and justify and clutch closer to us as soon as they are threatened. Anyone can see that it needs a process of stripping to get down to the kind of convictions we imagined two men reaching on the subject of vivisection. They don't know what they really believe till they've got there. Quite conceivably when they had stripped each might find his true home in the other's camp. An impression we get of Jesus in conflict with the Scribes and Pharisees is of the live spirit of reality showing up, in comparison, men like mummies, stiff with layers of traditional stuff. They were quite unconscious of it. They came along, armed with their problems or arguments, and they were disconcerted with the kind of answer or appeal that tried to cut through: "What do you *feel* to be reasonable, to be true, to be right?" They had never dreamt of applying that touchstone.

Recognising this hindrance to sincerity, we can feel the force of one phrase Jesus used to describe that quality: "Becoming as a little child"—"Except ye become as a little child ye shall in nowise enter the Kingdom of heaven." "I thank Thee, Father, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent and hast

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revealed them unto babes." In art, over against affectation and the falsifying of values and the straining for effect, the symbol of sincerity might well be a little naked child. Even in science, as Huxley declared in a well-known passage in one of his letters, the essential thing is "to sit down before the fact like a little child."

For contact with reality by any road, beauty or truth or goodness, the first need is to strip. And it is worth while to reiterate that we are all apt to assume we have done it, while there are still layers of second-hand stuff muffling up our self and its humble willingness to know the truth.

The other hindrance is from within. Our sight of the facts and our response to them are distorted by cross-currents in our own nature. There are personal antipathies and affinities, there is bias brought in by self-interest. It is not merely that we may be too inert to strip and find out our own beliefs, but we may not *want* to look straight; we may be afraid of what we should see and its compulsive power; it may suit our book to give a certain twist to reality. This distortion comes largely out of our unconscious mind; we may not be aware that it is operating, though it is perceptible to others. It is present more or less in all of us, and it is possible that some positive quality is needed to counteract it. Anyhow, in view of it, we can appreciate another phrase Jesus used for sincerity, "pure in heart"—"the pure in heart . . . shall see God." That phrase has a perfectly definite

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meaning for us. For example, a man has to say something to a crowd of people and gets up and speaks *with a pure heart*. Or you've got to act in some special situation, a dispute, or a wrong done, or whatever it may be, and you go into that situation seeking to act *with a pure heart*. We know perfectly well what that means, better than it could be explained in many words. We're pretty sure we understand by the phrase exactly what Jesus meant by it. It's different from the rather narrow, technical sense that an ecclesiastic might give it; it doesn't merely mean "sinless." We could apply it beyond the ordinary scope of moral ideas. It is possible even to look at a flower with a pure heart.

Sincerity is prevented by eddies of selfhood. We look on things with an acquisitive eye, trying to see how they may serve our profit or glorification. Our sight of things is distorted, and it is limited. We should know much more if we looked with a pure heart; or, perhaps, though we only knew a little, we should know that little extraordinarily well. We can realise that, quite likely, it is as Jesus said, and purity of heart is a vital condition of seeing God.

3. It dimly emerges from the above that sincerity is not so negative an attitude as it looks. There must be a certain live activity of spirit overcoming inertia before you will want to strip yourself of second-hand beliefs. And it's

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possible that something like love is necessary to counteract the distortions of selfhood. It may be a profound truth that sincerity in its highest form is attainable only through love.

However that may be, a definite claim has now to be made on you that does go beyond the negative. It's not enough to have your sense of truth unhampered and unbiassed. It's not enough to make your mind like a clean white sheet. "Ah," says someone, "but that's a very grave admission. It means you can't arrive at religious beliefs without weighting the scales." It does, indeed, bring us to the point where many thoughtful and serious people stick, and abandon as futile the search for any fundamental faith about the world and life. They would say, "I have an open mind. I am perfectly willing to believe anything that comes along and compels me to believe it. But I'm not going to feed myself on illusions." That is more or less the agnostic position, and plain and honest it seems to be. But, really, it is forcing oneself into an attitude which, if it were consistently maintained, would possess as little of life as a pebble does of the sea. Not one of the realities that matter in life is of the sort that will come and push itself into your rigid passivity. No artist ever found his picture merely by being passively open-minded; he must be positively responsive; he must let his own spirit vibrate in tune to catch some significance in the scene before him. If you are susceptible to music, the hearing of the symphony

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or the sonata doesn't mean that Beethoven, say, comes along and makes his mark on you. It doesn't happen like that. Your spirit must unite with his; you are not merely a passive hearer; something of yourself goes out into the music, or else it is nothing but noise for you. Even the search into the laws and nature of matter is guided by guesses and intuitions, often very amazing, as, for example, some of Newton's long shots. It almost seems as if the spirit of man were capable of intuitive insight into the pattern even of material reality. Of course in this realm intuitions can be followed up, as evidence becomes available, and made independent of the personal factor, and turned into "objective truth." About dead matter we can get what we should call dead certainty, which doesn't ask for more than merely an open mind. We can't get dead certainty about spiritual values. But, on the other hand, our living certainty about them can be even stronger. We know what we feel about the taste of strawberries and cream, or the Ninth Symphony, or William Blake. Such certainties only come into being through an affinity between us and what we are considering, and they're not valid for anyone else except on the same terms. All the richness of life is made up of them. And in order to reach the finest and furthest of them in, say, poetry or music or painting, or in the insight of friendship and love, men and women will strain to the utmost; they will stretch their

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sympathy, their subtlest faculties of perception and response; they will give of themselves very greatly in order to know, and be glad to do it. And yet, perhaps, when it comes to the very greatest things, they will propose to cut off all that. They will consider it correct to go back and sit down in their own house, and wait for a ring at the bell. They'll be at home to God if He comes along, and they're perfectly open to hear what He's got to say for Himself. . . . Nothing doing. There must be a giving of ourselves to know. It's stupid to talk of "having an open mind," as if that were doing one's bit. We can be mighty thankful for what we can get with the utmost reaching out of our finest faculties to have the sense of God, and touch deep certainties as to the meaning and purpose of all being. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

II

GOD THE CREATOR AND FATHER

The Wonder of Life.

IN accordance with the plan laid down, we start from the ground—from as near as you can get to rock-bottom. The foundation facts for you are yourself and the world you live in. That's all anyone has had to start from. And one chief reason why there are such varying degrees of reality, down to none at all, in different people's religion lies back here at the very beginning, where it is seldom looked for. *Many people's realisation of God isn't vivid because their realisation of the world and life isn't vivid.* God isn't great in their thoughts because they haven't got a great place to put Him in. Our first business is to get our eyes opened here. We have, so to speak, to make a throne in our thought and outlook for God.

The difficulty is that we don't know our eyes are not open. Read Psalm cxxxix. 1-16. Here is a man thrilled with the wonder of life and being, of the fact that he should have come into existence, of the fact that he should be in existence, and awed by the thought of a knowledge somewhere infinitely above his comprehension. If

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you read through these verses calmly, and follow the thought easily, and feel that it's all obviously true and familiar to you, then you can be quite sure that you know nothing about it! You think you do, but you don't. You haven't begun to feel what he was feeling. But you can. That wonder is waiting for any man or woman in the midst of life to feel. Can you get there—not merely follow this talk about it, and understand that it's possible, and take it as felt, but actually work at it with your mind and imagination? Think, think, think about the incredible miracle of the facts you start from.

For different people there will be different places at which it best comes through. Sometimes it takes one of the primary experiences—death, birth (parenthood) or falling in love—to cut through our dulness and stab our spirits awake. But the ordinary and familiar facts about us open up to infinity under certain conditions—if we “become as a little child” before them. There is the wonder of oneself. Think of Kipling's Kim in Lucknow Railway Station: a little boy, cross-legged, oblivious of all the traffic and flurry, pondering to himself, “What is Kim?” The present writer can speak of a strange mental state which others may know well, because these things are never so unique as one believes when young (and, therefore, feels it hopeless to try to communicate them). It was in younger days that the experience was most frequent, but it comes occasionally, at long intervals, still. A

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kind of super-consciousness would suddenly descend on one, in which oneself and everything round about, particularly other people, became unreal, just through the extraordinariness of the fact of their existence. It would suddenly be there, in the middle of playing a game, or moving in the press of people pouring out of a theatre. One felt as if one had got outside the ordinary substantial sense of existence, not as though there were a veil or any dimness, rather by virtue of a preternaturally clear vision, staring in amazement at all the facts of being which one normally took for granted, hearing one's own voice, moving one's own limbs, looking into the faces of friends, or the faces of passing strangers, and finding it simply incredible to accept the fact of oneself and the fact of others living and moving and having their being in this particular way at this particular place and moment, out of all space and time, whatever space and time might be. It lasted only for minutes, though they would seem long. Not that there was any terror in it; only a certain uncomfortable straining to get back into normal unconsciousness, as a tame bird into its accustomed cage.

Here is a quaint thing that the writer can remember to illustrate the strength of this state, showing it exploited and turned to practical account. He was a boy of ten, at that stage of learning to ride a bicycle when he could mount and ride but couldn't jump off without pulling in to a wall or curb. He was practising along a

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quiet road in the evening, and suddenly the mood was upon him. Since all existence was so unbelievably strange, why shouldn't he have a shot at jumping off? A smash would hardly be a ripple on the surface of the great miracle, and to have mastered this business would be a great satisfaction when he was presently back on the ordinary plane. So, taking advantage of a state in which there was no such thing as risk or courage, he did it with perfect success, and had got that accomplishment for future pride and use.

This is abnormal experience, but, even though you can't recognise it, it may suggest how much your ordinary working consciousness is taking for granted, and face you with the miracle that is nearest of all, and the wonder that dwarfs all other wonders—the miracle of your own existence, the mystery of your own ego, “fearfully and wonderfully made.”

Or you may be most accessible through the mystery of beauty. The writer, for his part, has elsewhere confessed: “One may question the reality of the curious pleasure the human animal takes in the arrangement of sounds in certain combinations and successions, and find nothing able to withstand the acid of doubt, but the whole art crumbling up—until one comes, say, to the *Cavatina*.¹ And there is that which doubt itself cannot succeed in doubting; one knows that, through this, one has to do with something

¹ Of Beethoven's B flat Quartet, Op. 130. The quotation is from *A Musical Pilgrim's Progress*.

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which belongs to eternity. If a mood of scepticism came, so drastic that all art seemed a self-intoxication, all truth a delusion, all goodness an old wives' tale, I think I would find in Beethoven the foundation on which I could rebuild faith in their reality."

Up among the mountain tops, on the roof of the world, the great affirmation may formulate itself within you, as in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. Jeremiah awoke to God among the almond trees in the springtime. Linnæus fell to his knees on English ground ablaze with yellow gorse. And there has always been the wonder of "the starry heavens above." You know all about that, of course. Are you sure? A poet, George Meredith, has made it the ultimate, subduing fact for the spirit of denial and negation :

On a starred night Prince Lucifer uprose,
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend

.

He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.

A philosopher, Kant, has put it as one of the two great wonders which the spirit of man had to contemplate. Is it that to you? Deliberately and seriously the suggestion is made to you that you spend a clean hour some night in that particular contemplation, in solitude and silence, as

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an essential part of your creed-making. Don't take it as done. Don't think you know exactly what it would mean to you. You don't in the least know.

That is rubbing it in pretty hard, you'll think. Yet not hard enough. The writer, perhaps, is judging from what he would be likely to do himself when he feels a persuasion that the reader will be a very rare bird who actually puts into practice a suggestion like this. Least of all will the old hand, who happens to run through these pages, think it necessary in his own case, however heartily he may applaud the insistent putting of it to others. We take for granted we know. We do it theoretically, and estimate just what we should get in such a way. But, if we do it only theoretically, we know it only theoretically. How can we expect to know anything of God unless we get outside the box of ideas we live in (of which this theoretical knowledge is part) and open every faculty we have to respond directly to reality? Consider the possibility that this is rather a test-point of your attitude, and your expectation of what you will get in a search for a personal creed, or a book about it. Is it the truth that you don't believe in your own personal capacity for communion with God, and don't hope to get more than a second-hand religion from the prophets or poets or someone who ratiocinates about them? You may as well put this challenge to yourself at an early stage, because all that follows will appeal to your own

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response to contacts in the physical order, moral order, and with one personality.

To return to the particular suggestion out of which this challenge arose: it may seem silly or affected. People can be interested in their own and one another's houses and never have a real consciousness of the great house we are all actually living in. Isn't that one reason why the poor little people, so many of them, have no mind for God? They haven't got a big enough place to put Him in. To repeat: Their realisation of God isn't vivid because their realisation of the world and life isn't vivid.

The Nature of God.

Supposing, then, we have some small vision of the Throne of the Universe, can we see God upon it? And what sort of God do we believe in?

At the outset we are faced with the fact that whatever God there may be is invisible. We can't see Him, or hear His voice. He makes no plain, irresistible revelation of Himself that compels every one to recognise Him. The facts of the case are exactly as Jesus pictured them in his greatest parable. In that parable we start with a father who has two sons in his house. It is his house; he has made it, he runs it; and he has begotten the sons and brought them up. But in that house the father is strangely unobtrusive. The sons, both the tame one and the

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wild one, are curiously oblivious of him, and apparently quite ignorant of what is in his mind or heart. They carry on, each in his own course, as if the father weren't there. And the father lets them do it. He makes no sign.

Isn't that a true picture of the world and life as we find them? Some people are doing the tasks and bearing the responsibilities that keep the life of the world going; others are out for pleasure and distractions; and the majority of both types carrying on in their chosen course without any thought of God. He doesn't seem to be about the place. He shows no clear sign of approval of the one type, no clear sign of grief or wrath over the other. It is His world; we are His, "It is He that hath made us and not we ourselves"; but He remains silent, invisible, enigmatic.

But this true picture of life as it commonly is, is not a picture of life as it should be. The parable moves towards the finding of God. It is possible, apparently, to come to know Him, and understand what He is like, and be sure of what is His will. How? Well, for example, if you were living in a house whose owner was absent and a stranger, you could yet come to know a great deal about him. His personality would speak in hundreds of subtle ways, especially where his tastes chimed with your own.

One part of the appeal of Jesus to men's perceptions (a second and different part will be taken in the next chapter) is along this line. He

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doesn't depend on arguments; he appeals to impressions that come to us as we look at the world and life. There are gleams and glimpses which we can catch, perhaps, if we want to catch them, if we let ourselves be responsive enough to catch them.

God as a Person.

The picture of the nature of God that comes in this way isn't built in stages. But, if we take it in stages, for the sake of describing it, the first stage would be coming to think of God as a person. It becomes inadequate to imagine that behind everything there is just some blind unconscious force or abstract principle on the throne of the universe. How does Jesus make us feel this? Notice that he never speaks of God in relation to raging storms, or vast dead things like mountains, or massed things like swarming nations of people, or even the stars and the mighty law and order pervading the universe. He took for granted that his hearers felt all that. The Old Testament was full of it. Indeed, a fault of the Hebrew genius was its tendency to the gigantesque. It was prone to pile mountains on mountains and to glory in thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand. People, thinking of such passages in the Psalms and Prophets, or, especially, the apocalyptic books, speak sometimes of the grandeur of the Hebrew imagination. But it isn't so much imagination as lack of im-

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agination. The formula for it is to take the biggest things that you can see and call them infinitesimal: the nations are dust of the balance, the islands a very little thing, whole forests not sufficient to make an altar fire. A chapter in Job, full of awe-inspiring contemplations, ends with the words, "Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways: and how small a whisper do we hear of him. But the thunder of his power who can understand?" This last happens to be rather a superb example of the method, but essentially the method is not imaginative but mechanical, like taking a quantity and raising it to the n th power.

It is worth while giving a word or two to this, because it is not an uncommon notion still, that the approach of the mind to God should be along an ascending scale of mere vastness, as if the bigger you could conceive the nearer you would come to touching His reality. But it is an attempt at realisation which yields nothing—except a somewhat stunned feeling if persisted in very hard. In this matter the transition from Old Testament to New is like the transition from Egyptian art to Greek. Pyramids were the bid of men for the sublime along the line of sheer size, and only succeed in making us feel its eternal futility; because it treats infinity as a quantity, and can never come the least bit nearer to it. But a single block of stone, carved in the poise of a Winged Victory, can capture something of the quality of the infinite.

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It was after exactly this pattern that Jesus made his bid for the realisation of God. He taught the Jews a higher wonder; not by out-topping the largest utterances of their seers. He worked a different vein—the wonder of individuality and personality. He speaks of little things rather than big things; and of the kind of things to which there can be a personal relationship. He makes us think of God, not as framing the cedars of Lebanon, but as clothing the flowers, not as ruling leviathan, but as caring for the sparrow. Above all, he speaks in terms of the individual—*one* sinner, *one* sheep, *one* sparrow. All the time, under his guidance, we are coming to feel individual beauties, individual values, and the conviction rises in us that God who has made them must have what we mean by “personality,” because our sense of God will be deposited round the points of intensest reality and highest value in our world.

Suppose we could be gods and world-makers, and we called into existence a little sphere of being. It would be the expression of ourself. A scientific-minded youth would delight in the mechanism of it—the intricate interplay of forces out of which he had framed light and heat and the substantiality of matter itself, and tides and geological process and cosmic motion. A girl with the instincts of an artist would delight in the possibilities of beauty, and out of the same raw material would evoke the values that make colour and sound and form, and find self-

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expression in compositions and harmonies of dawn-colours and landscapes, and isles of the sea, and bird-song, and wind among the trees. But there's something more in any or all of us which it would be our supreme achievement to express. Ultimately, it could only find creative fulfilment in beings made essentially after our own image, not our puppets, but free and self-determined, dimly exploring after us in the ways of beauty and truth and goodness, capable of love. That would be the supremely difficult and supremely satisfying creation. It alone could not be accomplished by *fiat* ; we should have to stand back, and withhold our power just from that part of the work in which all our creative passion came to a focus. But, supposing that quality in us could not achieve this full and perfect expression, it would, none the less, be operating, and might be detected by one who looked on with insight, in the manner, even, in which our fingers dealt with each detail, each little bit of individual being, were it only a flower. Personality will out. Love can't help revealing itself, not only in the face and figure of a picture, but in the artist's handling of a cottage roof.

It is because we ourselves are potential artists that we are able to appreciate the work of art, and through its form and colour, or through its music, are able to read things in the mind and heart of the man who made it. And, equally, it is because we are potential creators that we are

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capable, in some minute measure, of knowing the mind and heart of God, or, at any rate, of finding with certainty some things there. We know the things of God by the Spirit of God which is in us.

The Fatherhood of God.

It will be seen that the very process which compels us to think of God as "at least personality" is giving that personality the colours that are best summed up in the word Fatherhood. Jesus feels, and tried to make us feel, that character in the Maker and Master of the house. He asks to "consider" things. "Consider the lilies." And really, when his hearers looked where his finger suddenly pointed, they did seem to catch some message of God, and feel a sort of nameless assurance: "If God so clothe the grass of the field." He asks us to "consider" all sorts of things, even when he doesn't actually use the word—that is, to take a new look at them—to see if they haven't been radiating all the time a significance that we are capable of catching. Consider what human fatherhood can be like. Consider the shepherd's way with his sheep. Consider the face of childhood (setting a child in their midst). These are familiar facts. These are realities that exist in the world. Does what you feel about them give you any insight into the creative will that has brought them into being? Of course, there is nothing you can

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take hold of in any of these appeals. They would have absolutely no weight if you tried to use them as logical proofs. The sunlight consists of vibrations in the ether. Alongside the lilies nettles are growing. Behind the shepherd stands the butcher. For one lark singing in the sky here are the feathers of another struck down by a hawk. But Jesus isn't trying to prove. He is pointing here, pointing there, saying that God can be known, God can be felt by him that hath ears to hear and eyes to see. And it works if we let it work. We can begin to know God, if we give ourselves to know Him. The convictions that flash alight in us may be inexplicable and undemonstrable, but they can also be more sure than any dead certainty proved by logic. People who thought themselves incapable of faith find that, after all, there are things they believe with the last drop of blood in their bodies.

These convictions are so real that, not only do they take shape in spite of problems and apparent contradictions of them, but they can even mysteriously be born direct out of the heart of the contradictory facts. For example, one of Jesus' appeals to awaken our sense of the knowledge and love of God points to the sparrow fallen on the ground. Actually he points to a fragment representing the dark and tragic side of the world—pain, death, "nature red in tooth and claw, ravening." It would seem to be the very maddest kind of reasoning to say: "Don't be afraid, the God who lets the sparrow fall to

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the ground is your Father.” One wouldn’t expect that to reassure people and make them trustful and happy. But in some mysterious way it works. Just in the consciousness of our own pity in some particular tragedy we happen to know about, we suddenly have a sort of intuition that there is over all a great love of which our love is the token; we feel a sort of certainty that all the other countless tragedies are not unknown and uncared for, merely because we don’t happen to know about them. We may not understand why pain and sorrow have to be, but suddenly we feel sure it is not because God doesn’t know or doesn’t care. Faith isn’t born by thinking only of the bright side, and being resolutely blind to the dark side.

This truth is most strikingly illustrated by the fact that faith in the love and fatherhood of the Ruler of the Universe has been most often and most passionately awakened in men in association with the suffering and death of Jesus. But consideration of this can best come at a later stage. For the moment let your reading be rather in the first half of the story and teaching of Jesus—the Galilean gospel. So that we may come to share, according to our capacity, his living sense of the “Father, Lord of heaven and earth,” caught from the glint of familiar everyday facts about us.

It seems strange that some people should not be able to find a sign of God anywhere, and that others should find and feel Him in everything;

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or that we ourselves should pass from the one position to the other. But religion is not alone in this. The greatest realities have been put into the world in suchwise that we can be completely oblivious of them, and yet they are there abundantly, as soon as we try that responsive "considering" which is so analogous to the process of "listening-in."

All the scientific knowledge and mechanical power that our age has attained have been there waiting for men to take possession of them from the first. No one dreamed of them. It was only when men began to "consider" the falling of an apple, or the chattering of a kettle lid, or the crackling of a cat's fur, that what was being offered to us began to come through.

All the material of Art lies around us, on the stage of Nature and in the drama of human life. But in the midst of it we can be as blind as animals or savages, until some artist or poet listens-in, and catches, and makes us see and feel, the reality of beauty, or some eternal significance at the heart of fleeting things.

And faith, like science and like art, reaches its realities by listening-in. God is not, after all, remote, silent, invisible, unknowable. He is not far from every one of us.

Along this line perhaps you will be able to begin your creed with some such clause as: "I believe in God the Creator and Father." This is the first great aspect of God; this is the first great avenue by which human speculation and

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faith reach out towards God in every religion. And if the figure of God in this "transcendent" aspect (i.e., the creating power behind the world, and the ruling power over it) takes on for us the colour of Fatherhood, we are Christians in the first article of our creed.

NOTES

It is possible that in some cases this book will be used as a basis for group discussion. The real work, as has been pointed out, each must do for himself, and, where that is being done, it will bring one into a realm of intensely personal discoveries, experiences and realisations which it may not be always easy to talk about and compare. On the other hand, a group in which frank and intimate talk is possible can be a great stimulus to diffident or unreflective people to find out their own convictions and judgments, and to realise that they've got all the materials of a creed in themselves as much as anyone has.

Some questions and suggestions will raise most of the salient points so far :

1. Lying in bed of a morning, one often thinks one is fully awake, and it is only in the light of a clearer consciousness, a few minutes later, that one perceives one was still half-asleep. In the ordinary consciousness of everyday life can we

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be under the same kind of illusion ? Would it be possible for one to "come to himself," and be quite startled by the immediate facts of life and being which he had been accepting uncritically ? Are different types of people more and less susceptible to this wonder ? Does it come more easily, for example, to Eastern peoples than to Western, to poets than to business men ? Can strength of religious feeling be associated with the degree in which different types, or different individuals, have become awake to the wonder of being ?

2. Examine yourself, or compare experiences, as to what seem to you the most *real* things in the world. Are they perceptions, for example, of beauty, or of the might of natural law, or of some moral quality, or of personality itself in those whom you love ? Or is there, perhaps, nothing at all that gives you the sense of being up against ultimate reality—everything is doubttable, and suspected to be illusory ?

In the former case, do you find that your thought of God is consciously founded on that point of your own strongest conviction, i.e., do you find yourself saying, "That is reality ; that is eternal reality ; that is part, at any rate, of what the world is for and life is after ; that is willed of God ; that is a revelation of Him" ? Or have you been trying to make your religion stand on perceptions and judgments and valuations (such as "sin," "salvation," "peace," "eternal

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life") which are not tremendously vivid and alive for you (possibly because you haven't got into the depths of life yet, and haven't felt its biggest stresses and strains) ?

In the latter case (see first paragraph), are you sure you are incapable of conviction ? Are you sure there is no ultimate reality in the difference between Cordelia and Goneril, Jesus and Judas ? The feeling that would certainly make you want to side with one rather than the other, even if it meant death—are you sure that feeling is just a weak illusion in your heart ? Are you sure that "whatever gods there be" care nothing about it, and that life just makes use of it without valuing it ?

3. Do you feel any gap between the thought of the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, and the intimate personal God of Jesus' teaching ? Note how Jesus was careful to clasp both together, as in the words, "Father, Lord of heaven and earth." Trace what happens if either aspect is let go and drops out of one's religion—the softness of much "evangelical" religion (as exhibited especially in hymns) ; the hardness of the older Calvinism. The former dwelt on the love of God ; the latter bowed down before the glory of God. The one became all emotion ; the other all mind. Note especially : when either aspect is ignored, the remaining aspect, on which the emphasis rests, is falsified—the love of God becomes sentimental ; the glory of God becomes stern.

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4. With modern knowledge of the vastness of the Universe, and the probability of innumerable inhabited worlds, does it become harder to think of God as Father? If so, compare this difficulty with the reluctance of the Jews to widen their thought of God as their own special and particular tribal deity. Their fear was misplaced. The Christian God, though conceived as so much greater and vaster, was conceived also as far more intimate and near.

Standing Problems.

Then there are certain well-recognised and much-handled problems which lie across the line of march. These should probably only be discussed in so far as they are actually holding someone up. Any one of them is capable of keeping a group of intelligent people talking for months. Realise that faith can be curiously independent of them, that, on the one hand, it is a very easy thing for a theologian to find a glib solution of them, and not be a bit nearer any real sense of God, and, on the other hand, one can have positive convictions about God, and leave many problems unsolved and undiscussed, as Jesus did the problem of pain. Try to deal with the following points if they are actually blocking the way to faith, but don't discuss them for their own sake. *Don't worry if there are things you don't understand in the notes on them; they will be understood by those by whom they are needed.*

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(a) *Materialism*.—Explanations of the world and life that leave no room for wonder or reverence, because the only reality is matter, and the only progress purely mechanical process. Materialism was a cold and depressing threat a generation ago, when by “matter” men understood something like what a piece of iron or rock appeared to be. Now the picture of the world in terms of pure scientific materialism is more strange and mystical than the description of any spiritual vision or allegory. Our bodies are not continuous stuff, but composed of innumerable systems, after the pattern of the solar system, spaced as far apart, in proportion, as the stars in the sky are remote from one another. Our personality is associated with what is really a constellation in space. As some mystic might have dreamt of the whole Milky Way Universe having consciousness associated with it—as being, perhaps, the body of God—so the scientist bids us actually conceive the physical body with which our life and personality are bound up. Not that this makes any philosophical difference; but it makes a poetical and practical difference. The numbing effect with which the materialist bore down on the human spirit (or by which he was himself borne down) was due to some vague estimate of matter as dull, dead stuff, which quenched the light of all spiritual values that could be considered as properties of it. But it doesn’t signify a scrap—it doesn’t even make the conviction of freedom of will more

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untenable—if consciousness and beauty and goodness and love should be calculable for a supreme mind as harmonies associated with the configuration of positive and negative eddies in the ether, or, shall we say, point-events in space-time. The physical calculus is like the score of the music.

A generation ago religion fought against materialism to keep some territory out of its grasp, in order to preserve room for spirit. But the simplest way now (and it would also show how unreal the conflict always was) would be to hand over the whole case to the materialist, and see what follows. Suppose he can take everything as the outcome of protons and electrons, he has to include among their properties the potentiality of writing Shakespeare's plays, or thinking Newton's thoughts, or being Jesus. His case then would be like that of the Norman of the Conquest, in Kipling's poem, who took England so completely that, "England hath taken me." In explaining all spiritual things in terms of matter he would have made matter itself spiritual.

(b) *Revelation*.—Why has not God made impossible all doubt and uncertainty by showing His hand plainly, compelling every one to recognise Him? It would be so easy for God to give an unmistakable sign.

Answers to this are not hard to find, and may be left to groups to discover, with these hints: Power can give an absolutely compelling sign of itself; love can't give an absolutely compelling

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sign. God's method must be determined by what God wants to create. What is that ?

(c) *The Problem of Pain.*—Are pain and death reconcilable with a God of love ? Note these points : Pain, fear and death are not in the least evils that could with advantage be cut clean out. They don't exist in the lowest forms of life. It is by means of death that forms of life are able, through successive generations, to rise higher. We ourselves should be in a sad case if we were incapable of pain or fear ; we shouldn't, except by accident, live long without their warnings. The Christian Science view of them as inherently evil, and therefore not to be recognised as realities in a loving God's world, is foolish. We have acquired the susceptibility to them in order to be better equipped for living. The laws which our bodies have learned to make use of work blindly and uniformly, and we are more conscious of the disadvantages than of the advantages. But it is open to knowledge and love to master the laws more and more so as to be more able to prevent suffering, and to want more to prevent it.

The problem is most acute for us when we see the suffering of the innocent. God need not let natural law work universally and uniformly. Why does He not interfere on behalf of a child in agony, or deflect the murderer's knife, or deliver the victim of the slave-trader ? In the first place, it may be reflected that the suffering of the innocent is not all meaningless waste.

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Nearly always it is helping to redeem the world. It "makes sin exceeding sinful," until the soul of man turns from it. The suffering of nameless black victims brought abolition of slavery to its present stage. But further, consider the alternative to God's letting the innocent suffer. Should we be prepared to will a world in which only the guilty should suffer—a world in which suffering had the direct sanction of God, and in which, therefore, there could be no pity and no succour? No need to cover in the open drain in the village street; if diphtheria comes it will come as the visitation of God and will touch only those whom He is judging. In the world as it is we can work in love and pity in conscious union with the Spirit of God to help and to heal, to master the natural causes, and cast out the moral causes of human suffering.

III

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READING and thinking about the last chapter, you may have felt that it put before you the whole field in which God is knowable, and that anything more must be just an expansion of it, or a more minute analysis of it. This is not the case. The last chapter did try to indicate one whole field, and as much was said about it as the limits of this small book allow. But we can begin in a new field to reach God all over again—and perhaps not quite the same God. A few words had better be said first about these two different ways of coming to know God and the two different aspects in which He is seen.

It is quite on the cards that, more than anything else in the Christian religion, the doctrine of the Trinity has seemed to you a bit of pure artificiality; nothing, perhaps, gives you such a sense of unreality as hearing the formula used—"Father, Son and Holy Ghost." Well, of course, we're not concerned a bit about the strange ways in which other people, however venerable, have attempted to express their beliefs; we are out on our own. But the queer thing is that, having left this doctrine on one side, no sooner do we start tracing our convictions to their roots, and putting them

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in order, than we shall inevitably find that we have to invent something like it as our own private doctrine. So far from being a bit of gratuitous unreality, it was an attempt to state the facts, as they must appear to Christians, and even to many who would not call themselves Christians. It doesn't start with one God, and, by a piece of fantastic theorising, divide Him into three. It recognises, as a matter of practical experience, that there are different regions in which we become aware of God, different aspects in which we can know Him—in some ways almost contradictory aspects. Having stated them all, what it does is to clasp them together and affirm, by an act of faith, that God is One. Of course it is a doctrine which lent itself to all sorts of intellectual jugglery, but in essence it is not a needless complicating of simple facts, but rather an attempt at simplifying, which yet refuses to be simpler than the facts. And every one who tries to work out his own creed will find himself in the same position which has made men, for example, speak of "God" *and* "the Holy Spirit," using different words to describe different aspects of God. No doubt these aspects can be reconciled and harmonised (though by no means easily or obviously). But what is more important than reconciling them is to feel separately and distinctively the full force and special quality of each one.

Thus the transition we are now going to make could be described in a general way as from the "static" to the "dynamic." This applies:

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(1) To our method and attitude. The convictions you have already searched yourself for are the ones that are most vivid when you are contemplative and receptive. Those you now seek are born out of passionate feeling and strong movements of the will.

(2) To the picture of God that is reached. When you seek God as Creator and Ruler and Father you think of Him as over and above all ; you can only conceive Him as all-wise and all-powerful. But now we shall be finding God, not over life, but in it ; and not just as a Presence, but as a Pressure ; not merely a Creator God but a creative God, striving, struggling, even baffled.

(3) To the quality of our resultant faith. This will not be describable as "the peace of God," enabling us to endure anything and accept everything. It will rather be an urgency of God that brings us more sharply up against things, and makes us want to change them.

We could sum up by saying that Christian belief in the Father, as Jesus by his teaching helps people to find it, is expressed in Browning's lines :

God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world.

But there's another God and another faith, which Jesus, by his life and death, also awakens and intensifies in us, which finds God in almost the opposite way, not in His heaven, but in the world,

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and exactly through the sense that all's *not* right with it. As said above, these two aspects of God might be reconciled ; but it is far more important to realise the absolute truth of each one in its own sphere. Having dealt with the first in the last chapter, we approach now the second.

Plainly, it will matter tremendously to a man in what degree and what quality he finds God in the sphere of moral vision and striving. If his conviction is entirely negative, that will be momentous. If, in his own passionate caring and striving, he believes that the skies above are empty of anyone or anything that knows and feels and wills as he does, he will be up against that blank ; like one of Mr Wells' characters, he will want to spit at it. On the other hand, how have men described it when they have felt a positive conviction in this matter ? The widest and most general definition is supplied by Matthew Arnold (a non-Christian), as the sense of " a Power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness." The term " the Holy Spirit " is obviously just a more graphic term for this same conviction. We find it used in the Old Testament (always as associated with, and working through, human personality) ; and it is taken over in the New Testament and by Christians ever since. Paul also, however, identifies the Power with Christ, indwelling himself and others. The John-writings do the same thing, speaking of Christ as the " Logos " of God which has been the shaping, creative Power even from the beginning of the world.

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You can be left to find your own name and picture for this manifestation of God. Let us explore the ways by which the conviction itself is born in us :

1. *The World-Process and the Ascent of Man.*

Though contemplation is the characteristic attitude of our last inquiry, it is not altogether excluded from this one. But now it will be contemplation not merely of the created facts, but of the creative process. Paul spoke of the creation groaning and travailing together unto some end, and the history of evolution, as it has been worked out in the last two generations, has filled in and justified the phrase. Although the process can be explained in a way that makes it seem almost mechanical from stage to stage, that doesn't weaken the overwhelming impression we get when we stand back and consider as a whole the fact that it should be taking place at all ; nor the sense we have of a moral direction and purpose in it. We imply this last when we speak of *higher* forms of life being evolved from *lower*. The biologist may try to use colourless words, and speak of *simple* forms developing into more *complex* forms. But, in spite of himself, he is always slipping into language which reveals his judgment that there has been not merely branching process, but upward progress. From water and dust to mind and spirit of man is an ascent.

In the department of psychological evolution, which has been more recently investigated, the

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same kind of impression can come to us still more strongly. If we consider how the instinct of motherhood, for example, can be traced onward from the purely mechanical actions of an insect, till it is expressing itself in human motherhood, and hence, spreading out from its original object, expands into compassion and benevolence and some of the most noble and constructive and healing forces in human society—or if we consider how the crude animal instincts in ourselves are “sublimated,” until some or all of their force is finding release and expression in spiritual ways (as art out of the sex instinct, or the social reformer’s zeal out of the fighting instinct)—then we get, perhaps, the strongest sense it is possible to have of the actual presence of God in life as a creative, upward pressure, in face of the inertia, or even the downward gravitation, of which we are all too conscious.

Almost the only one of the fundamental laws of nature the latest science has left us is the “Law of Least Action,” the gist of which is that nothing will do more than it has to ; action will select the shortest space-path and the longest time-path available for it. All the more impressively is a counter-law revealed, wherever we have to do with the life-principle. Looked at materialistically, the one basic motto of the universe is “The Least Possible.” Yet when we consider Life, using that sense of values we can’t help using, we hear an inarticulate but indubitable cry that contradicts it, saying something like, “The Fullest

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Possible," "The Highest Possible." With that voice we recognise a Will in the universe, and a God who is Creator of it in both aspects, Creator both of the resistant material and of that which pushes up through it, the latter not being creatable except against the grain of the former and its law of inertia.

It is only fair to say that there is a case against finding any moral meaning in the cosmic process. Argument, as a rule, is being relegated to the Notes, but we will deal with the case here, not only because this is a critically important bit of the ground for some minds, on which faith stands or falls, but because, in discussing it, the nature of the judgments which have to be made in this realm will grow clearer, and that is always the main business of this book, argument one way or the other being incidental. Still, those not vitally concerned had better skip on to Section 2.

The world-process, it may be said, has no moral worth, since it ultimately returns to its starting-point. If, in the nature of things, there is an ascent from zero, in the same nature of things a descent to zero is indicated. The sun is passing through its life-history as a star, turning its very substance into radiation at the rate of millions of tons a minute. Ultimately, what is left of it will be cold and dark, and, after a certain peak, civilisation will degenerate, in the dwindling of all that sustains it, and life on the Earth will go downhill towards the point of extinction. If we read moral worth in the upward sweep of the

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curve, by the same standards it becomes a minus quantity in the corresponding decline, and, as it has been expressed, $x = 0$. The only continuity that there can be is an endless repetition of the cycle, which leaves the final result unchanged. If $x = 0$ be the first and last result, the equation never represents more than that. However complex and imposing it may appear at the present or any other stage, if it were simplified out we should find ourselves staring at that valuation of the world and life.

Again, exactly the same truth confronts us in the smaller and more immediate setting of our own or any other individual life—a full circle from 0 to 0.

Taking the latter challenge first, the writer may say that he, personally, was always rather a sceptic about the continuance of life beyond death, was unaware of any assurance on the subject such as many seem to have, and unimpressed by any arguments or presentations of immortality, until, one day, he had a latent conviction switched into consciousness by a simple stating of the alternative.

William de Morgan, in a very intimate letter to a friend at a time of bereavement, says something like this, "Perhaps we shall live and die and never know what it all meant." Suddenly one knew one couldn't believe that; as he, apparently (though he professed no faith) couldn't. Think of it: that human life in us and others should come into existence, and come to be so much, and do so much, and know so much of the

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universe (measure, for example, the size of space, or the weight of all the matter that exists, known and unknown, and put rough but calculated figures to them), and then go out, and never know more, never know why or what it was all for! Fairly looked at, that was simply unbelievable. On this point, as well as on others that will come up in a later chapter, a humble agnosticism, willing to look at alternatives, is curiously far more truly the birth-state of faith than loud assertion to silence our doubts and keep our courage up.

Turning now to the larger, cosmic prospect of "nothing to nothing," there are answering arguments of course. The sun's expectation of life is so vast, according to the modern estimate, that the span of human history up to the present covers only an exceedingly small fraction of the first minute of mankind's possible day of life. Granted that the mere postponement of the end makes no essential difference to the worth of the whole process, yet, when this is the scale, we have no right to say that what would appear to us to be the end will be the end when it comes. Man may not be so bound to the wheel of things. It is sure even now that he has the kind of powers that enable him to know and master the physical realm. If already he has been able to do this in some infinitesimal degree, we can set no limit through the coming ages to his emancipation in and from the material universe. The very terms used in a discussion of this subject may be transformed a thousand times in the future—since

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Einstein has already shown that our view of time itself is false.

A warning, perhaps, should be added to this whole section. We can appeal to the impression on us of the cosmic process, and believe it is going somewhere and not just round in a circle. Yet we must not use that sense of movement and direction as a way of escape from the need to find any worth and meaning in life here and now. The mind for which all we are and know has no value except as a momentary stepping-stone towards the future—that mind can hardly, if it is honest and thorough, be able to conceive abiding reality anywhere in the future. It has only buried the question by making it more remote. That is the position of many modern people with a vague, unexamined belief in “progress.” But there is a root conviction, without which this whole appeal to the cosmic process falls to the ground, or becomes no more than a blind. It is the finding of the quality of eternity in the things we have to do with here and now. Transient though our sight of them is, they can so affect us that we see them as glimpses of what transcends time and change. There is a time for everything, says Ecclesiastes, *i.e.*, all things pass. Yet, he goes on, “He hath made everything beautiful in its time, also he hath set eternity in their heart.” This analogy suggests itself: A new chum at the prospecting game is excited by catching the glint of “colour” in the washing-pan, and wants to clutch at it, and begins to rock

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the pan very cautiously. The old-timer, watching him, grins, and tells him to go ahead, "You couldn't wash the gold out if you tried." He knows the nature of the stuff. When all the dirt is gone, every speck of gold which showed up for a moment in the process will be there. That offers a pretty good parable of life. The bright things show up in a momentary way like that. We want to clutch at them. We ache when we can't hold their loveliness and dearness, and they are lost again in the swirl. But ask yourself what you believe about the nature of them—the personality of one whom you have loved, the worlds that were unveiled while the music lasted, the mystery of colour—and either you have, or you have not, the conviction that they were not only beautiful in their time, but they had eternity at their heart. There is no other assurance of the ultimate worth of the cosmic process than the gleams we catch in it of that which it is evolving, and which here and now has the quality of eternity.

2. *The Sense of Absolute Right and Wrong.*

Next let us think of those convictions that have a rather more dynamic kind of origin in us. These we can't reach by contemplation; we become aware of them in the instant of some definite impulse or recoil in ourselves, concerned with right or wrong. They don't, by any means, always appear when such an issue arises; they are rather rare, probably. Most of our decisions about right

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and wrong do not come from very deep. They are just based on conventions we conform to, and standards we have accepted from other people. But at some time we may find ourselves making a judgment that is curiously absolute: it doesn't matter what anybody or everybody thinks, it does not matter what consequences are involved—*this is right*. At such times, more intimately, we can have the assurance of "a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." We are in line with something. In the strength of such a feeling the Hebrew prophet would break out into utterance with the prelude (so stunningly presumptuous), "The Lord says. . . ." The voice may be our voice, but it is as if it had hit a note to which all God's universe resonates, "'No,' say Thy mountains, 'No,' Thy skies." Or again it is as if we were being pained by something that clashed with the whole order of things, as when Blake wrote :

A robin-redbreast in a cage
Puts all heaven in a rage.

Tolstoi somewhere speaks (in a passage not to hand at the moment) of being present at an execution, and, as the knife fell, something within him said, "That is wrong." Independently of all possible reasoning or argument or explanation or circumstances, he had a sense of absolute wrong. Such movements of the spirit don't come without a conviction that it is the Spirit of God which has moved within us.

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No one so well as Jesus could (and can) bring people into contact with the naked reality of right and wrong, so that they realise with a shock that right and wrong are live wires which matter because of the energy that's actually flowing through them. Think of the lawyer coming with his question as to which was the first commandment, and Jesus speaking the glorious words about love to God and man, and telling (according to one of the accounts) the parable of the Good Samaritan, till all the insulation is gone, and the man is prickling with the live force at the core of the old familiar commandment and a voice is saying within him (the same sort of voice that spoke in Tolstoi), "That is real. That is right." And then Jesus : *Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.*

3. *The Self and the Spirit of God.*

Finally, there are realisations that come in a still more dynamic way. The impulses and recoils of the spirit just spoken of have been reactions to external facts in the world about us. Just because they are movements, they bring flashes of awareness of a surrounding movement or pressure ; but they are only theoretical so to speak. There is a fuller and closer experience of the indwelling God possible for us in the practical living of our own life, choice of our own will, set of our own personality. It may come as a sense of conflict with God, or as a sense of union with Him.

On the one hand, we may discover ourselves

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“to be fighting against God.” We won’t describe this state as “conviction of sin,” because that is no longer a strong enough expression; the word “sin” has become too trite in the ears of most modern people; it is too conventionally reckoned. Nine-tenths of the material we would account as “sin,” we don’t for a moment visualise as sin against the God we ourselves, in our inmost hearts, believe in. Sin against ourselves, perhaps; sin against others; sin against some conventional, Church figure of God. But to be found fighting against the God we really believe in and adore is a fearful thing. Here is an example, which, because it has that quality, won’t, it is hoped, seem trivial.

Four schoolboys on holiday at Richmond in Yorkshire had several times come on a water-rat feeding in the middle of a little pond on the top of a hill. They stoned it, but it always dived and escaped into a drain-pipe which was the only outlet from the pond. Another day, when they were passing that way, they laid plans, and the water-rat, caught again in the middle of the pond, was faced with all four of them standing directly above the drain with armfuls of stones, and no cover anywhere. It took its one forlorn hope, plunged in and swam straight towards them. The writer can still see its little wedge-shaped head arrowing the water as it came on, with the stones splashing all round it. When it was within about five or six feet of them it dived. But this, too, had been foreseen. A big slab of stone was

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held directly above the entrance to the drain, and, as soon as the flitting shape was seen under it, was let go. There was a mighty splash, and when the slab was lifted the dead body of the little furry creature was under it. The boys went on; such incidents were part of the day's ploy. But the one who had been chiefly responsible for the scheme, and who had dropped the stone, had an acute revulsion. He was silent; then quarrelling with his companions; then off by himself. A mere spasm of compunction is nothing. But in some way that incident made the deepest sort of mark on him. He was not, as you will gather, a specially tender-hearted youngster, but for many years there was a particular horror and pain associated with that recollection. It had various psychological effects, small and great. For example, a peculiar fondness for Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, and for a night-sketch of a pond called "The Old Water-Rat" in Du Maurier's *Peter Ibbetson* was traced back to it. Other effects are in evidence to this day, across the gap of twelve years to forty. The essence of it was, he had been found to be fighting against God—the God of a schoolboy, if you like, but real. That little wedge on the water, coming on in the face of death, bright eye, keen brain, plucky heart, no flurry, no funk, was the symbol of what was beautiful on land or sea, of what one could believe in and adore. Anyone would wish to be like that, and take sides with that. In all the books one assumed that one did belong to its

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side. And instead, one had been identified with the stupid, brute force that crushed it. Many readers, doubtless, will be able in similar fashion to recollect something that left a deep mark of pain or shame. Examine it, and see if it had not this special quality of sin against God—against one's own, real God.

There's a vast difference between what we often describe as a sense of sin, and the realisation that we've been fighting against the living God—the God whom, if we don't love and adore, there's no meaning in the world or life. David passed from one to the other when he cried in his psalm of penitence: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." "Thee only!" What about Uriah? What about Bathsheba? Yes, but against God supremely, that's what he means. The supreme pain and horror is the finding God as a living, indwelling Presence, through the realisation that we've been on the opposite side to Him. It comes when we see our sin, not merely as sin against ourselves, or sin against others, or as transgression of the laws of the Ruler and Creator of all, away up somewhere in the skies, but when we see it as violence done against a God who is in actual personal relationship to us, who is struggling to fulfil His loving and glorious ends in us and through us. This is what writers have tried to describe when they speak not of breaking God's commandments, but of "grieving the Holy Spirit" or "crucifying Christ" (the indwelling Christ). One finds God

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within by the fearful way of finding that one has been fighting against Him.

On the other hand, the Spirit of God may become real by our surrender to it, and union with it. There is an experience which the first Christians described as "receiving the Holy Spirit." Indeed the Christian Church began out of such an experience, which somehow transformed the impotence and perplexity and timidity of the disciples Jesus had left to carry on his work. We haven't much information about it, but we can be fairly certain of the general direction by which they arrived at it. It is pretty certain they didn't work themselves up to it, talking till at last they began to understand, exhorting one another till at last their courage was screwed up. We can't see it happening like that. The course of the fifty days must have taken an opposite direction. It must have led through a growing sense of inadequacy and helplessness to a point of absolute bankruptcy. They couldn't carry on Jesus' work; they couldn't do what he had done; they had nothing to go to the people with. And then, at the lowest point, somehow they entered the Kingdom as little children. Perhaps they just threw themselves open in a very special way to God's will, whatever it might be. If it was His will that they should cast themselves from the house-top, that would do as well as anything. And that receptiveness was filled; there was a strength that was made perfect in their weakness. Out they went into the streets to face the people

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who had crucified their Lord, with not only courage to speak, but things to say.

It was such a definite, tangible experience that it became thereafter one of the marks of the Christian life—whether one had “received the Holy Spirit,” whether one had this special assurance of the reality of the indwelling God. Perhaps it became too technicalised. It was pretty generally associated with those manifestations of ecstasy and hysteria which gave Paul so much anxiety. There always is the tendency to think that the evidence is more authentic the more abnormal it is. But take away all that element from the account of Pentecost (which would have been forgotten in another fifty days if that had been its substance), and you have left the real tokens of what receiving the Holy Spirit meant, in the moral transformation of the disciples, and still more in the description of the beautiful, Christlike common life which flowed from it.

This is the last of the ways we have to consider by which conviction can come, and it is the fullest. When we are perfectly receptive to God we find Him within. When we really want to know the right in order to do it, whatever it may be, the answer is not a blank. There is a right thing to do. This universe is not a moral vacuum. There is a Will which can flow in and make itself known to our humility and sincerity. Some of us, perhaps, have only felt ourselves on the brink of that discovery. We have got near enough to feel that one might let go—one might say, “Here

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am I. I will go, or come, wherever God's word to me leads. I will do anything, face anything, I will take up any sort of work, accept any risk, make any sacrifice." And, being so near, we have known that, if we could say this, life would suddenly be a different thing; there would be no more uncertainty; it would be God, working in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure, making His strength perfect in our weakness.

This will always be the supreme way by which conviction can come. By this way Jesus opened himself to God's indwelling. Think of the high-tide moment of his life, when, on the crest of faith and joy, he thanked God, and cried with such glorious assurance and passionate pity, "Come unto me. . . . Learn of me." Why? Because I am mighty and lordly? No. "For I am meek and lowly." By that way for Jesus, as for those whom he taught, all things were delivered unto him of God.

In your creed, written or unwritten, will there not be a clause, or a paragraph, or a series of paragraphs, corresponding to "I believe in the Holy Spirit"?

NOTES

1. *The Trinity.*

Is there not something twofold or threefold about your own thought of God and relationship to Him, when you begin to disentangle it? Have

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you not known two frames of mind, both coming out of union with God? When you think of God as the infinite Wisdom, infinite Power, infinite Love over all, the result is what can be called (Carlyle's word) "blessedness." The quality of it is *serenity*, free from fear or anger or any excitement; able to suffer anything in the knowledge that He will keep us from all real evil; and able to make things work together for good, and "not let even the worst ills go from us till they have blessed us." But "serenity" would not, at any rate, be the *defining* word for our union with the striving, creative, indwelling God. Serenity is not, indeed, always and everywhere even a desirable quality. Certainly it will normally make for the greatest efficiency in doing things, as well as in bearing things. But not invariably. In an emergency situation intense emotion will enable a man to achieve what would have been beyond the limits of quiet strength of mind and conscious will. Physiologists tell us that there are definite physical substances ("hormones") liberated in the system by certain extreme emotions, some of which confer emergency powers. This, of course, is only a very small and special case; but it makes the point. We can't be meant to have that device in the machinery of our nature no longer available because we are always serene.

In a larger and less theoretical way the different aspects in which God is knowable, and the different attitudes which result, can be

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studied in Jesus himself. A useful and interesting examination of the first three Gospels might be made on this point, comparing the picture in the first half of the narrative with that in the second half. The dividing-point is when Jesus prepares to go up to Jerusalem. It is through the Galilean Jesus that we know God the Creator and Father; it is through the Jerusalem Jesus that we know the struggling, indwelling Spirit of God. Mark gives events in their truest sequence; the material in Matthew and Luke must be fitted into Mark's historical framework. Note the changed bearing of Jesus—the sense of constraint on him; the recurrence of the word “must”; a sterner note in his voice, especially to would-be adherents; a new look on his face, that affected even the disciples' relation to him; outbreaks of more passionate and poignant feeling; dark moments; new sayings that contrast with, almost clash with, some of the earlier ones; the light of God in which he walked still as bright, but no longer like the wide, free sunlight; rather like the lightning flash, splitting inky clouds. References are not given; it will be more valuable to search for them, and so get also the whole effect of the Jerusalem section as compared with the Galilean.

Some may be bothered by the emphasis laid on different aspects of God, each absolute in its own way. But reality is like that, and we run into worse troubles by reducing it to a false unity. Compare the trinity of the good, the true, the

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beautiful. We get into an awful mess if we start reducing one of these to terms of another, *e.g.* if we judge pictures by the good they'll do, or suppress truths that look ugly or upsetting. We have to be loyal to each value separately as an end in itself. Over and above, of course, we can have a conviction that somehow, somewhere, they must all be one and the same. So, too, by an act of faith, we believe that God is one. The division is not in God; the division only exists in our limited minds. But it does exist there, and we must beware of trying to eliminate it by not using to the full all the ways of knowing God, and thus sacrificing some part of His reality.

2. *The Ascent of Man.*

If available, some one versed in the subject should be got to amplify what is said about psychological evolution. It might be particularly profitable that this should be expounded and discussed.

3. *Absolute Right and Wrong.*

Two men may have these certainties and yet not agree with one another. How can it be the voice of God that says one thing for one man, and a different thing for another? Different lands often have completely different systems of morality. The certainties of one age are transcended by a later age, as so many Old Testament standards

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by ours. Is there any such thing as absolute right? These suggestions may be offered:

- (a) Two contradictory convictions of God's will can rarely, if ever, meet without one turning out to be stable, and the other opening into it, *provided* that those who hold them continue in a state of humble willingness to know God's will.
- (b) A man whose vision we have transcended may still have been right in believing he knew God's will for him in his place and time and on his plane of understanding. Though we speak of absolute right, that doesn't mean independently of the persons involved; they themselves are part of the situation in which the right has to be done.
- (c) Even so, it is amazing how near finality men have been able to come who, with a pure heart, have sought God's will, even in comparatively dark ages. Sayings of some of the Hebrew prophets, which originally had that authentic ring of conviction, could be quoted and endorsed by Jesus, and stand probably for ever.
- (d) Different moralities among different races are yet converging moralities; in their highest expression they come very near finding a meeting-ground.

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4. *How is God's will revealed to us? And how does God dwell in us?*

What are we to expect? Early Christians found God's will sometimes by the casting of lots, sometimes through a dream or vision. They took as evidence of the Holy Spirit abnormal symptoms such as "speaking with tongues." Such things are probably outside our experience. Is ours an inferior experience?

Abnormal manifestations wouldn't make God's presence more authentic; they would rather show Him a strange visitant, Whose nature and ways are alien from ours. A truly immanent God will work through the plain, daylight, rational and moral means that are the main channels of all the good that is seen and done in the world. His will must be findable through our own normal perceptions and judgments.

NOTE: This need not completely exclude God's will being known in some sudden intimation that comes, apparently, out of the blue, or even in a vision or dream. A conviction that has been resisted and repressed may break out of our unconscious mind in just such a way. Paul's experience at his conversion, or Peter's when his national exclusiveness was rebuked in the dream of the sheet let down from heaven, seem to be striking examples of it.

This makes the problem clearer, but perhaps

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more difficult. We've thrown out the magic and mysteriousness, but haven't we thrown out God too? It is our own perception, our own judgment, our own choice; there is no extra element that is not of us; how then is any of it of God?

One has heard of a Quaker, who, when he had an important decision to make, would take a bit of paper and set the "Pros" down on one side and the "Cons" on the other, cancel out, and whichever side was left with a surplus he took to be God's voice. Could God's will be known in this way?

This can be debated. The writer would say "Yes," with two reservations:

- (1) The man would have to be sure he was using every channel by which God's will could be known. It is doubtful if the subtler and finer perceptions could ever be put on paper in such a cut-and-dried way.
- (2) He would have to feel and accept the conclusion *as* God's will. Let him arrive at it by the use of all the powers God had given him, but let him then honour it as something far greater and holier than merely his own will. Let him believe that the eternal will of God is behind his vision and sense of right, and that he is nearest to expressing it when he is most sincere and faithful to them.

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The common error is in thinking that what is of us cannot be of God. The very opposite ought to be the Christian faith. The more truly and purely a thing is of us—of our real self—the more it must be of God. Where else could it have come from, and what else could it express? Whenever we try to know the truth and do the right and love the beautiful, the power of God is flowing through us. But something more is wanted: that we should be conscious it is so. That is what the sense of God dwelling in us means. It will add a quality, as it did for the first Christians, that can come in no other way.

IV

JESUS CHRIST: I.—OUR VALUATION OF JESUS

THROUGHOUT you have had impressed upon you the need to start from the ground, finding out for your foundations those convictions in yourself that are most simply and utterly sure. Never is this method so necessary, and never can it be so fruitful, as when you come to review what you think of Christ and what he means to you. Begin with first things. The first thing in this case is the figure and person of Jesus himself as you see him, rather than any doctrines about him. (We continue to avoid using the pronominal capital letter, because, if you want one, it will have to be, with whatever it signifies, all your own.)

People get stuck by thinking that the starting-point is a blind act of belief in certain dogmas about Jesus. It is true that the Gospel narratives, on which we depend for all we know of Jesus, tell us that his birth was not like that of man, and that his body never decayed. But think of the kind of evidence that every one to-day would feel to be necessary before such statements could be accepted *if someone else than Jesus were concerned*. We haven't got the kind of evidence that would be needed to establish them in an independent and impersonal way as facts. Where

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these beliefs arise and are held with real conviction the secret of their strength is that they follow as consequences of men's impression of Jesus and feeling about him. They may or may not follow in the same way for you (you will presently have to consider whether they do); but in any case don't try to start with them.

Our Moral Valuation of Jesus' Personality.

Instead of being compelled to enter by such a tremendous portal, you can begin quite simply and naturally from what you think of Jesus and what you feel about him, just as men and women did who met him in the flesh. The starting-point can be defined as *our moral valuation of the personality of Jesus*. It is rather a ponderous and not very pretty description. Perhaps in shrinking from the vague and sentimental it falls off at the other end. At any rate we must guard against misapprehension. "Making a valuation" may suggest a cold-blooded and systematic process of analysis or summing-up—an inventory of Jesus and his qualities and characteristics, such as we may not be conscious of ever having made, and may not want to make. But the valuation of personality need not be a systematic process; it may be instantaneous. Falling in love, for example, is making a valuation of personality—of its value to you—though it is not the word a poet would use. One of the wonderful things about personality is that it is not exhibited only as a total effect. If you are buying a house or a

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typewriter you want to see and examine it as a whole and in every detail before you can judge its worth. It would be no use showing you a brick or a screw as a sample. But with human personality the essence of the whole may be implicit in a single unconscious look or word or action.

I did but see her passing by
And yet I love her till I die.

Judging by the incidents told in the Gospels, the response of men and women to Jesus happened rather often in exactly such a way. And it still does. A mere glimpse of Jesus in action, or some detached word of his, lingering by chance in the mind, is proved to be charged with his very self, for this man or that has perceived him through it, and in the instant of perceiving knows that this is one whom he loves until he die. It may be one of those sudden, impassioned utterances which, like a vortex in the bright envelope of the sun, seem to let us see down to the intense heart of his inner world ; as when he said, " I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth " ; or when he said, " See that ye despise not one of these little ones ; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven "—a still better example, because we may have no earthly notion what the words mean ; the whole value is just a sudden revelation of himself—of his way of looking at a child, and the thought and feeling behind the

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look. Or, again, one has known of a man for whom everything began through the glimpse of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, and a sudden first realisation of something more in Christ than in any of the great seers and great leaders—one could not, for example, imagine Socrates weeping over Athens.

Few of us, probably, can remember coming in sight of Jesus literally for the first time, most of us having grown up in an atmosphere of familiarity with his life and teaching. Still, our first real sight, our own individual relation to him, has come (or perhaps still has to come) at a point where our personality makes a valuation of his, either by some sudden, intuitive perception such as has been described, or possibly by a deliberate and conscious study and reckoning up (which we by no means wish to rule out altogether).

Its Universality and Diversity.

What right have we to assume that you will have any important valuation to make of this one figure? The striking universality and diversity of appeal made by Jesus gives us some right to assume it.

The English gentleman finds in him the root of courtesy and honour. The Indian mystic, though not "Christian," is drawn to him by an irresistible affinity. By the young and adventurous he is sometimes slumped in with all that their rebel instinct has turned against, in name, but not in person. For he, too, is a heretic and

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revolutionary, and he plays the game of life with a grace and a beauty of action, with a fearless directness of attack, that make him the friend and leader they ask for. To the reflective and the imaginative, to the old and the wise, he is the well of all wisdom. When all is said and done and thought, it is his sayings that remain, and penetrate the heart with their profound truth; so that when some great artist or poet is trying to speak the first and last word about his art, or some modern scientist, like Huxley, about his science, it is a saying of Jesus that comes to his lips. He who seemed to care nothing about art, and knew nothing of science, is somehow at the meeting-ground of all the great roads into reality, when only we get far enough along them.

Think how men of opposite types and factions want him and claim him as on their side—the soldier and the conscientious objector, the conservative and the socialist; sometimes those who fanatically argue that Christianity has been the greatest curse humanity has suffered from will gruffly say that they have no quarrel with Jesus. They, too, want him.

Such diverse valuations may seem to cancel out. Each man, it might be said, makes Jesus a reflection of himself. It is true that we must always do that to some extent because of our limitations. And it is true that there is an obvious danger of making him the accomplice of one's prejudices and using him as an authority to berate others, rather than taking him humbly as one's own

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guide. But something remains constant through all the diverse interpretations. It is as nearly as can be inconceivable, for example, that anyone could have ascribed to Jesus himself one of the first miracles recorded in the New Testament after he was gone—the striking dead of Ananias and Sapphira. No end of people can easily accept it as a Christian wonder, as they have been able to accept so much else. But if they stopped to think, they could not see Jesus doing it.

A Valuation of Personality.

The valuation of Jesus keeps the quality of a personal relationship. It would not be the same thing to have all his teaching in the form of oracles carved on tables of stone or spoken by the voice of some Invisible One. Although every express bit of truth might be there it would not be all the truth without his personality behind it. Paul has caught this when he speaks that word about the “face” of Jesus Christ; and it is a truth of Christian experience. The shop-girl at Sale time, tired till she can hardly stand, hating the memory of the human face that has been before her so multitudinously, often in its acquisitive and least lovely guise, suddenly sees “his” face, and, by some wonderful softening within her and some wonderful strengthening, can carry on afresh, with almost infinite patience and kindness. So, too, the jaded school-teacher, near the point of “hating the little beasts.” So, too, the

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man who has taken a high, solitary path, and is conscious of the sea of hate and coarse thinking all around. In such cases it is not any truth, proclaimed from the sky or written in letters of gold, about the infinite worth of every human soul, or the beauty of childhood, or the gain of losing the world, that could have made the difference, but Jesus himself, being patient and kind with people, or reverencing childhood, or setting out steadfastly towards Jerusalem and the Cross.

You have found God in the region of mind and contemplation as the Creator and Father; you have found God in the sphere of will and striving as the Holy Spirit. If you should turn out to be finding God by still a third way, it will be through the same kind of faculty, the same sort of perception and affinity, by which you recognise and cleave to another personality in friendship, or in devoted, adoring homage.

A Moral Valuation.

When a relationship and affinity so intensely personal are in question why should we introduce a word like "moral," and talk about "a moral valuation"? Doesn't that renew our sense of dealing in stiff and cold terms? Not a bit; or, at any rate, there's no reason why it should. Falling in love, to return to that analogy, not only makes a valuation of personality but makes a moral valuation of it.

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When a lover says,

. . . she was what my heart first awaking
Whispered the world was,

he is making a moral valuation of the biggest kind. He is not only feeling her preciousness to himself, her desirability, but he is finding in her the fulfilment of a moral ideal. He is not, of course, thinking of her as a good girl, an excellent person and so on. Words with any suggestion of conventional standards of goodness would be disdainfully rejected. But only because they are so transcended, only because a far bigger moral judgment is being made. What he beholds is her glorious rightness ; she is supremely what the world and life ought to be.

Our moral judgment of Jesus can have exactly the same personal colour and passion, out of sight beyond any mere testing or estimating him by ordinary, accepted moral standards.

But, someone may say dubiously, surely the moral valuations that are made in this spirit are notoriously untrustworthy ; these experiences that lift one to the stars are rarely very enduring experiences. We could reply that it is very doubtful if mere duration in time is a sound test of reality. A man may fleetingly attain to seeing things *sub specie æternitatis*. That is to say, what we hold for a few instants may be the eternal truth, rather than the practical sort of wisdom that we settle down to and knock along with for fifty years. But, in any case, the moral

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valuation of Jesus stands the test of time. In recorded human experience, both Christian and non-Christian, it is nearly always deepened and intensified as life goes on—"That one face which, far from vanish, rather grows."

In the case of the lover, a valuation such as we quoted may be built up with an element of illusion in it. The lover may be only dressing upon a lay figure the qualities and realities which he inwardly rates highest and most adores. He imagines that his fairest dream of noble and beautiful living is substantiated; presently he may find it still only his own dream projected by himself. Another flaw is that, although the love of man and woman may make a moral valuation, it may not seek nor want a moral possession. The only moral possession is to become like what we value. But love, without being a merely physical passion, still may have no dream of possessing much higher than the baby's instinct to put into its mouth an attractive object. The realities that the soul adores and hungers for cannot be possessed in one's self merely by having another for one's own in closest and longest intimacy.

But when a man or woman says to Jesus, "Thou art what my heart first awaking whispered the world was," there is no element of illusion. It is not we who are personifying the vision of what life can be for a childlike spirit, a pure heart, a fearless faith, a selfless love. We are discovering it in him. No clearer, closer seeing, nor the passing of time, is going to dim the brightness of it.

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Nor is there any illusion that we can possess it by some easier way than following him and being like him.

Now what is the nature of this vision of life we see in Jesus? There are endless view-points, but a few words will be said about three aspects, in one of which it often bursts on people.

Cleanness of Life.—There is in human nature a longing for what one of the psalmists calls “the land of uprightness.” There is a contempt that can come over a man for himself and the world he lives in—for the insincerities, the petty motives, the schemings and dodgings, the ugly passions that make life a rotten little game instead of a great one. If the sense of sin is a disappearing quantity this hasn’t disappeared. It is a frequent and passionate theme in modern literature (see Gorki’s *The Man who was Afraid*, Shaw’s *Blanco Posnet*, Masfield’s *Everlasting Mercy*, etc.).

It isn’t only visionary sort of people, sick at heart, who have felt it. Any little scrub of a man, immersed from birth to death in financial wiliness, has it too, if all were known. Any little fluffy girl, declaring she’s “fed-up,” can mean pretty much what Shakespeare meant when he flung out that great sonnet: “Tired of all these for restful death I cry.”

To such a mood, whether slight or intense, the sight of Jesus and his way of life can come like the visible embodiment of a vague private dream of one’s own. Zaccheus, without apparently a word

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being said, suddenly stands up straight, lets all his grubby garments drop to his feet, and takes a header into it, "like a swimmer into cleanness leaping."

"Cleanness" we've called it, but it's not whiteness, this quality; not white like snow, a rather unnatural colour for fields or men, that can't be kept up, that is bound to be smirched and then we have to turn a clean sheet and begin again, or let the whole thing go hang. The cleanness of life we see in Jesus is more like clearness—the clearness of a stream, at home among the things of earth and open to the sunlight. Not spotlessness, which would be rather unnatural if we had it, and which we're not very sure we even want, but frankness, sincerity, kindness, the childlike spirit—that's the sort of cleanness of life we see in Jesus; it's the sort that men are really thirsty for, and the sort that's not impracticable and impossible to realise.

Fullness of Life.—The normal course of evolution shows us life ever striving to live more and more abundantly, equipping itself with larger powers, attaining a fuller mastery over its environment. When any species shows a development towards more static and more limited forms we judge it as retrograde to the general tendency. By this test human "progress" of recent times would become questionable. Industrial civilisation, with its specialisation of work, mechanisation of life, congestions of towns, etc., has not tended to produce an individual with more

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abundant life. A modern novelist sets one of his characters off on a systematic exploration and observation of the life of the mass of the people in the greatest city of the world to-day. A long dispassionate catalogue of what he saw ends thus: "and about this sordid wilderness went a population that seemed at first as sordid. It was in no sense a tragic population. But it saw little of the sun, felt the wind but rarely, and so had a white, dull skin that looked degenerate and ominous to a West-end eye. It was not naked or bare-footed, but it wore cheap clothes that were tawdry when new, and speedily became faded, discoloured, dusty and draggled. It was slovenly and almost wilfully ugly in its speech and gestures. The entertainment of this eastern London was jingle, its religion was claptrap, its reading feeble and sensational rubbish."

Of course it is easy and true to say that such a review was missing a thousand lovely and heroic things in the endless miles of streets "northward, eastward and over the Thames southward." But still, there is a representative bird's-eye view of the life of countless people to-day that makes us cry out for health of life and fullness of life.

Go to the other end of the social scale, to the wealthy and leisured and fashionable classes, and, although the external conditions and limitations will be so completely changed, the last sentence of the above indictment, which is much the most formidable sentence in it, will still very largely apply. In the Savoy Hotel at midnight, in

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fashionable churches and the eddies of the latest Eastern or transatlantic cults, in the big lending libraries, you would once again conclude that their entertainment was jingle, their religion claptrap, their reading feeble and sensational rubbish.

Such surveys can give us a most oppressive sense that the life of man is not big enough in this civilisation of ours. Life can know so much greater joys and appreciations, and be so much nobler an adventure, if people were not shame-faced about taking it other than flippantly. John makes Jesus say, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." It is certainly what is wanted.

This looking at men in the mass gives you a chance to feel the need for more abundant life. It would lead on to aspects of the practical Christian task in the world. But that is outside our present scope. So let us get closer down to it, and consider fullness of life as an immediate inner problem of the individual, as it might be you.

Everybody wants fullness of life, or starts by wanting it, anyhow. Any youth or girl, almost, you can imagine saying, "I want all that's going. I want all that is to be had. 'Give me the portion that falleth to me.' I want laughter, friendship, love, adventure, colour, beauty, wonder, joy, achievement, urgencies and energies within and fine and stirring banners to march under."

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There is something thrilling about youth, standing on the threshold and making such a huge demand on life, wanting life big and wanting it beautiful. Why doesn't it come off? It is only very rarely that it does. Lamb, in one of his Essays, makes a character say something like this: "How sad to think that these fine lads will grow up to be frivolous members of Parliament!" In his mind's eye he sees the adult form of the public-school boy; he sees him as club-man, fastidious about his food; he sees him prosing in the House and voting for his party; he sees him in his pleasures and he sees him in his prejudices, and it isn't nearly good enough. The whole life, especially on the side that tries to pass for serious, is too petty, too *frivolous*, to be anything like a fulfilment of the possibilities which once were visibly present.

Or think of a girl, lovely to look at, attractive, courted, finding her lightest word or merest whim mysteriously powerful and all the world anxious to be allowed to give her pleasure. Is she, who has so much, safely launched on the way to fullness of life? How does it go on? The time comes when she realises that the basis of her world is like ice melting under her. The pleasures themselves are growing stale, and also her power of winning them is going from her as mysteriously as it came; in its nature it is bound to wane. She can see but two alternatives; one, a more reckless plunging, larger and larger doses of distraction and indulgence, ending,

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logically, in drink and drugs, and through with it all, perhaps, before she is out of her twenties. The other alternative, from her point of view, is resignation to a poor second-best, to have to drop more and more into the background, and, as wife or single woman, to begin to be valued by her usefulness, to be ancillary to others. The desperate way, or the dull and bitter safe way, or some compromise between them, but in any case life, as her eyes see it, doomed to dwindle.

What is wrong in these cases, which wanted life to be so big, and find it more and more coming to resemble "crawling up a drain-pipe till one dies"?

We can get to the root of it by thinking out the course of events in lives which develop quite differently, which open up, rather than narrow down and peter out. There is always an escape in some degree or form from egoism. In the most ordinary ways it may happen like this: A young fellow starts using some capacity he has got, perhaps writing or drawing or playing at chemistry or tinkering with machinery, there being a large element of what the psychologist would call "exhibitionism," showing-off himself, as incentive. Or he starts preparing for what is going to be his business or profession, any incentive being largely that this is the way to make money for enjoying himself. And, in either case, he begins to get interested more and more deeply in the work itself, until presently it is no longer a pedestal to lift *him* up, but has become an end which he serves. So far, now, from using

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his art for vainglory, he will have a conscience about it that demands to be satisfied, even though people in general are displeased and disappointed, and even though there should be not a single person who will appreciate. So far from using his profession or craft or sometimes his business merely as a money-making means, he will have a devotion to it and a pride in it which, in the last resort, would face ruin rather than let it down.

Or an experience comes to the girl which works a transmutation in her outlook. She cares for someone in such a way that she is decentralised from self. As wife and mother she asks nothing better than to live or die for her husband or her children.

All such cases (and we need hardly say that the sexes can be reversed in the illustrations given) have one thing in common. A transformation has taken place—the submerging of the self in its work or the object of its love; the *losing* of the self in some degree and some form.

Now that happens to coincide with one of Jesus' key-sayings, which he must have deeply and memorably impressed on those who heard him, for it is more often repeated in the Gospels, in varying forms, than almost any other saying: "He that loseth his life shall find it." And now we can begin to understand how it's possible that Jesus has something to say to youth, standing on the threshold and asking for laughter, love, joy, beauty, adventure, achievement and all the rest

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of it. He wants us to have them. He wants us to have the very best that is going, the most thrilling joys, the richest satisfactions, the biggest kind of life. Youth is apt to think of Jesus as standing for self-denial rather than self-fulfilment, for a pale, thin sort of life, "white as a rain-washed bone." But the very music and feasting and dancing which the young son in the parable hungered for are the symbols Jesus uses at the end of the story. One way of seeking them, and they turned to swine-husks; a transformed attitude, and the youth found them as realities in his father's home.

Jesus only shows up the blind alleys which we are apt to take for short-cuts. It is strictly true to say that there is no single thing which his teaching would take away from man except to give him the actual substance of which it was the mirage, or the whole of which it was part. Dr. Fosdick has brought out the point well. Liberatorism, for example, is an attempt to grab what it takes to be the flower without the leaves and the wood, representing the duties and responsibilities. But the flower is only one part which cannot be separated from the plant that it belongs to, from all that goes with it—parent-hood, home, mutual loyalty, lifelong comradeship. Try to clutch the flower alone and it comes to pieces and goes rotten in your hands. You can't revile life for that. It is you who have mutilated and perverted life

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

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That is a truth that everybody has verified in experience. Giving is a fuller way of living than getting. The difference is that between a spring and a sink. The ways in which life is great are the ways in which it is creative, and these also are the ways along which it has the finest adventures and tastes the supreme satisfactions.

Loving others doesn't mean making oneself smaller; it means self-enlargement. A father and mother live not only in themselves but live in their children. A man who loves his fellows has a bigger self than a man who loves only himself. Loving more means living more.

Jesus used the expression "denying oneself," only because he was so fond of the sharp paradox of it. It is the highest conceivable fulfilment of life that we recognise in him. His whole joyful and loving purpose was to help man to find a bigger self, and to lead out his desires and hungers to the biggest things and the best things and the abiding things, and save them from dwindling and shrivelling up, like those tendrils of a plant which have failed to find that to which they can hold, and by which they can draw the whole plant upwards.

Right Relationships.—In Jesus we get a sight of the right way for all men and women to live with one another. Both for us as individuals in contact with one another, and for mankind in the larger groups, there is a fellowship the lack of which is pretty literally hell. Jesus not only

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tells us the principles of it, but in him we feel the spirit of it. The principles of it are simple: Loving one's neighbour—kindness, sympathy, generosity, forgiveness—not merely as an expression of one's own magnanimity, but based on a sense of the worth of everybody to himself and his Maker. Judging not—not setting up to be little God-Almighty's. It isn't judging others that matters, but helping others, and the man who puts himself in the attitude of judging isn't really doing any good. Doing unto others as ye would that they should do unto you—the best that you've ever had done to you, the things that have touched and amazed you and helped you very much—*do* those things. Let that sort of stuff loose in the world. And contrariwise, don't be resonant to, don't take up and repeat and multiply, the ugly, destructive, divisive things, such as hate, anger, hauteur, rough play or foul play.

These principles are well known, but there comes in here an illustration of what we have already tried to bring out, that, even when such plain truths are concerned, we don't get the full drive and rightness of them except in the personality of Jesus. Think of people's general impression of and attitude to the Sermon on the Mount. They may see it as beautiful, but they don't see it as beautiful, practical common sense about living. By some queer twist in their minds they fly off at once to the most extreme possible applications. They discuss stock prob-

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lems, such as, "Is it possible to be a Christian in business?" "Can a nation be Christian in its foreign policy?" Of course in such spheres we can be brought face to face with perplexing or challenging problems of conduct. Any man, whatever his moral world, may find himself in a situation where the only alternative to being untrue to his own standards is to suffer loss—to give up everything perhaps. The saint may draw the line very high up; the burglar may draw it at murder; but the problem case can arise for each of them just the same; it's not peculiar to Christianity. To speculate whether a principle can be applied in every conceivable situation is to get out of all relation to life. You can always reach a marginal case; you have only to go on making the circumstances more and more extreme until you do. That sort of thing ends in holy men of the East hiring strangers to sleep in their bed lest the fleas should starve, or in the Rabbinical hair-splitting and straining at gnats while swallowing camels. The result in the case of Christianity is that people come to regard just its extreme selvage edge, and forget all about the main everyday substance of it. No wonder that "being a Christian" comes to have an unnatural and strained and rarefied signification. Any way of life would if it were treated like that.

Thus when a man thinks of the saying about turning the other cheek, it is almost certain that he will think at once of the extremest possible case, and that he will never think of anything

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else. There never was a saying that has had so much attention and discussion, with such complete ignoring of its practical everyday sense and meaning. Generally speaking, in this world you don't find madmen and devils rushing about striking at perfectly offenceless friends or strangers. It does happen, of course; but in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand if anyone attacks you with hand or tongue it's because you have innocently or deliberately offended. No doubt there's the extreme and exceptional problem-case, that can be academically discussed; but what's worth thinking of is the everyday application to the kind of situation that's happening all the time. And the simple and beautiful and entirely practical meaning is: Be open to correction and rebuke. Be willing to acknowledge faults and accept criticism and learn from it. Don't fly into a heat, and answer anger with anger in a clash in which all hope of truth and right emerging is lost.

The world that we have sight of in Jesus is a world of beautiful and right human relationships. When we know its principles only in words it may remain visionary or academic for us. But when we find it involved in our own judgment of Jesus as he was in spirit and in life, it is not only the most beautiful, but the most reasonable and most real way for us all to live with one another.

These, then, are some facets of our moral valuation of the personality of Jesus.

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In the voice of youth, he was

. . . what my heart first awaking
Whispered the world was.

In the voice of age,

In him was life
And the life was the light of men.

A Religious Valuation of Jesus.

What is the relation of Jesus to God, and what is the relation of our sight of him and impression of him to our thought of God? Through Jesus we come to God. We have seen in Chapters II and III how that happens. It is through Jesus that we find the highest faith in God the Creator and Father. It is our own faith, but it is he who has done more than anyone else to release it in us. It is through Jesus that we are brought to recognise God as an inward presence in ourselves, so much so that, for many Christians, the inner God has the lineaments of Jesus himself. And it is Jesus who lifts up our faith to the affirmation that the striving, indwelling Spirit in us is one with the omnipotent God who has made all and rules all. In the present chapter we have discussed aspects of Jesus' personality and teaching without reference to the background and atmosphere in which they are set. Jesus assumed, for a background, that this world is God's world, and, for an atmosphere, man's capacity for faith in God's love; and, without that setting, would have

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had no hope that himself or his teaching could be real to men.

It is not enough to say that through Jesus we know God ; through Jesus we can *love* God, which when it comes to be spoken in its full form is not a little thing to say. It means " I accept life," " I say ' Yes ' to the Universe." " I throw myself open in trust and love to all God's dealing." It is a lowly acceptance which at the same time sets the spirit of man on an almost dizzy height in the midst of life.

But in the way of such reconciliation of man and God stand stronger challenges and deeper gulfs than we have yet reckoned with. Whether human faith finds in Jesus any help against these will be considered in the next chapter. And, if he is still the Way and the Truth and the Life, he will begin to be not only the guide of our faith but one of its objects. The eyes that have been taught by him to see will in the end be turned on himself, and we shall make our religious valuation of the fact of Christ.

NOTES

Systematic Study of the Material.

The most important matter arising out of this chapter is our portrait of Jesus, and the sources from which it is put together. Systematic study has, perhaps, been too lightly passed by. Anyone

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who is taking this business seriously ought to take a fresh look at the material. This is another of the places where we are apt to imagine we know all that matters, and have got all there is to be got, and where it is dead certain we are mistaken in thinking so. Even familiar knowledge of the Gospels is usually of a scrappy kind, due to the custom of using them for short readings, both in church and in private.

It will take you about an hour to read through the Gospel by Mark. Do that some evening. You have probably often read a 100,000-word novel at a sitting. Read Mark in this way in order to get the narrative, to see how Jesus went out to the world of men, what his impact on it was like, how the situation changed and developed, his corresponding bearing, and the unfolding in his own consciousness of what it was in him to be and do.

Read Matthew and Luke for further material, chiefly recorded talk, much of it common to them both, which they have added to Mark's account.

John will not help you much in the forming of a direct and vivid portrait. It is a more secondary view of Jesus you will get there—the resultant of an impression of him on another mind, which has woven and elaborated the material according to its own patterns of thought. Though his was a profound mind and often a beautiful one, you will rarely feel the first-hand touch of Jesus coming through it to you as in the more artless narratives. And sometimes, indeed, where he writes, "Jesus

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said . . .,” you will want to reply, “No, he never did.” But it is extremely unlikely that you will feel thus about the fragment which has got embedded in John at the beginning of the eighth chapter.

The sources of our portrait, putting them all together, are small in quantity. They will be much smaller for any one of us than the actual documents. There is sure to be a good deal that doesn't contribute anything as far as we are concerned. Sometimes the writers are plainly yielding to the temptation to appeal merely to the sense of the marvellous; an appeal which Jesus discountenanced, and which we ourselves feel to be cheap and irrelevant. And there will be a good deal that misses the mark with us through our own deficiencies of perception and response.

What do you think of this suggestion which the writer ventures to make: that you should construct a gospel of your own—a Gospel according to Me? Don't do it just by marking, but by copying out, or, if that is too laborious, by cutting out of two Testaments just those bits which really matter for you.

There would probably be, for example, a quadrilateral of utterances, to start with, in almost anyone's gospel: the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, the passage at the end of the eleventh chapter of Matthew spoken at the peak-moment of Jesus' consciousness, and the parable of the Prodigal Son—very small fragments compared

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with the first four Epistles of the New Testament which have been called the Quadrilateral of Paul. To these add other sayings and incidents and bits of the narrative, whatever moves you or seems to be full of light, whatever strikes you as of the essence of Jesus.

You haven't got the equipment to be a higher critic (beyond applying some obvious and common-sense principles on the kind of changes that tend to take place in descriptions passing from mouth to mouth) even if you wanted to be one; but you can separate out what is authentic for you. Coleridge felt he knew Shakespeare's voice so well that he could separate out to a word the bits that were his in a passage of mixed authorship. You may come to have the same sort of confidence that your gospel represents the real Jesus. This may not be the case, of course; and the dangers, as well as the advantages, of this subjective method of selection may be debated. But remember that everybody who cares does it to some extent; everybody has his special bits. Remember also it is not suggested that you should permanently scrap the rest; it is far too valuable, with the possibility, almost the certainty, of further finds to be made in it, for that.

Jesus and Art and Science.

The three supreme values are the good, the true and the beautiful. What Jesus cared about was the good. But there are some men and

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women for whom the most important value in life is one of the others. They may seem to us to be slack and indifferent about moral standards, and yet in their own special realm have tremendously high and austere standards and a very exacting conscience which disciplines them with the severity of a fanatic. We should seem to them to be correspondingly lax and culpable in the things they felt to be the most important things. In Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*, Dubedat is an extreme picture of such a figure. Utterly unscrupulous, he yet turns out to have a creed to which he has been passionately faithful. "I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of colour, the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of Art that has made these hands blessed. Amen. Amen." Benvenuto Cellini came near being another in actual life. And it is easy to imagine a similar case to these in the world of science. Has Jesus any point of contact with such men in the sphere that is most real to them? If not, how can we call him universal? The problem is not merely an academic one. It becomes actual and quite common in the case of more ordinary folk who are consciously Christian in the practical duties and relationships of life, but who, either as a vocational task or an amateur taste, have a strong interest in the field of art or that of science, this interest, which may be a very large piece of their life, having no conscious relation to Jesus Christ.

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In the chapter you have just read, this sentence is to be found: "He who seemed to care nothing about art, and knew nothing of science, is somehow at the meeting-ground of all the great roads into reality, when only we get far enough along them." For any who wish it the writer will expand his view a little more fully.

There are these three roads into reality, each of them independent, each of them a law unto itself, each of them having its own "categorical imperative." That is to say, you can't, without injury, subordinate any one to any other; you can't use art to make people good—"Art is a good master but a bad servant"; you can't seek the truth only in so far as it looks beautiful or is likely to make the world better. Independence is vital to all three.

Yet, in apparent contradiction of this, if art or science or morality is made an end in itself it degenerates. "Art for art's sake" becomes decadent and poisonous; science for science's sake becomes fossilised; what morality becomes when made an end in itself will be touched on in the next Note. Each of them, though it may not be subordinated to the others, must seek an end which would have to be expressed in a larger formula, such as "Art for Life's sake." The common end of all three is then seen to be something not clearly defined, but which could be best put as "Fullness of life," or, translated into religious terms, "the Glory of God." In

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that common end the three roads converge, and, though you must not go cross-country from one to another, if you press far enough along your own particular road (supposing you have one), you will find yourselves going side by side with other seekers, and the Law will be alike for you all.

Now Jesus was on one particular road. He was a Jew. The Jews have contributed the moral strand to mankind's make-up; even the one strongly moral cult of the Greeks and the Romans (Stoicism) was founded by a Semite. The moral value was so exclusively the great value of life for the Jews that plastic art was forbidden among them. Jesus came as the flower on that stem; he emerged from it, but he belonged to it. Goodness was what mattered supremely for him. But Jesus, along that particular road, so reached the heart of reality that where he is all roads meet.

What do we mean? His vision of the good was so large and wide, so wholly for fullness of life and the glory of God, that it is not only the greatest morality but more; it transcends that word. Whether he knew it or not, he speaks not only for the saint, but for the artist and the scientist *in their own tongue*. They find in his sayings great truths expressed that apply in their special spheres.

Morality, we might say, is only a special technique appropriate to one of the roads. Each of the other roads has similarly its own technique. But there ought to be some larger word or

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phrase, such as "Ethic of Life," to describe the great laws of life, so seen and so stated as to be common to them all. Saint or artist or scientist might get so "far ben" by his own road as to have the ideas and vocabulary of his special technique opening out into this Ethic of Life. The very greatest human figures in different departments have reached that point in some measure : Jesus altogether.

If we are challenged as to the content of this Ethic of Life to be found in Jesus, here is a brief attempt at a statement of it :

(1) The first condition for any seeking into reality is sincerity. This is equally and absolutely true for artist and saint and scientist (Huxley, as already quoted, speaks, in Jesus' own phrase, of science "sitting down before the fact like a little child.")

(2) The two great dangers which Jesus talks about to the exclusion of almost all others are Money and Pharisaism. Just these are the greatest dangers to art and science. Painting pot-boilers, leaving pure research for the atmosphere of commercial exploitation of knowledge, may be surrenders to the one temptation—you can't serve God and Mammon if you are an artist or a scientist. A mind closed against new truth, revering the old Masters and stoning the new ones ; and the pose of the specialist or the airs of the expert, their lack of humility, are the blight of the other.

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(3) It is remarkable how many of the key-sayings of Jesus reveal their profound truth equally, though sometimes in different aspects, in the three different realms.

(4) The last word is Love. Ultimately there is no abiding reality in any of the three roads without love. Paul has stated this explicitly for art and morality and science in 1 Corinthians xiii. Though one speak with the tongues of men and of angels, though one carry duty and sacrifice to the utmost limit, though one attain all knowledge, the result in the last issue is found to be barren, our road into reality doesn't arrive unless it arrives at love. Witness Michelangelo, giving up his art at the end, and turning elsewhere for reality (see his sonnet translated by Mrs Oliphant in *Makers of Florence*); witness Shakespeare, almost arriving in his last play, but not quite, and laying down his pen with the sense of futility heavy upon him; witness, finally, Beethoven, in the qualities of supreme tenderness and joy that begin to appear in his latest work, breaking through to it, and finding his art the road of reality to the end and beyond it.

The same truth assuredly holds of science also. It is only more difficult to illustrate there, because science doesn't in itself make these personal revelations.

So that the way to Jesus would not involve any man's turning back from his own line of

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intensest reality, but rather his pressing further along it. By being more an artist, more a scientist, not less, one can reach him.

This would be the writer's attempt to verify the universality of Jesus in a connection in which there is a great deal of interest and discussion just now, and in which many people in their own lives are finding a practical difficulty in realising it.

The Reasonableness of Jesus.

A judgment of Jesus which very generally prevails is that he was right but not reasonable. The latter word is used in its common colloquial sense, meaning not only that which accords with our reason, but that which accords with all the rest of us too, that which is fair, human, proportioned to our ability.

First, it should be said that this is a perfectly sound objection to Jesus if it is true. It is easy to ride over it with high-falutin sentiments or high-horse arguments. But it won't be disposed of in that way. Every help should be given to state a case which is not easy to state.

Sometimes, in the classic opposition of fervent prophet and unresponsive people, there is a word which can be said for the people, and which is all the more worth saying because it never seems to be said. It is possible to formulate and present at people's heads some moral demand which their conscience feels it can't deny, and which is yet resisted not by mere inertia or timidity. There may be some accumulated, innate sense of

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life, and the conditions on which life is possible, which is not able to explain itself or justify itself, but which positively says, "No." The fanatical "prophet" would feel he was up against mere slowness or deadness of mind and heart and will. But actually what was resisting him might be a vision more fully alive than his own, though unconscious of its own nature.

Thus, for example, men acknowledge a call to take on them some of the burden of the world, and their conscience tells them that this is right. But what limits are there to the burden one should assume? None that conscience can recognise. If it's right to take a bit of the world's suffering and sorrow and wrong on our heart, isn't it right to take more and more *ad infinitum*? If it's right to feel in some degree, isn't it right to feel more and more until we are a fountain of tears? Taking all men as our brethren, the claims on our sympathy are innumerable. What right have we to remain oblivious of any facts of pain and need, of injustice, cruelty or horror the wide world over? What right have we to feel for any single one of them less than the full meed of self-identifying sympathy? We could be arraigned for it by the "prophet," and conscience would have to acknowledge guilt. Yet the only alternative would be to let ourselves be overwhelmed, to take the burden of the world upon our hearts until we sank under it, and life itself was impossible, and we became incapable of doing anything to help in even one case.

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In many other directions which can be readily conceived the claim of the right, taken in isolation, can be seen leading straight out into the void. The same conscience that responds to the claim of right in Jesus would have to acknowledge that the fanatic, hiring strangers to feed his bed-fleas, was still further on in one particular straight line.

Can we then trust ourselves to our conscience ? It becomes clear that it is possible to present a right which is not reasonable. The root of the trouble is the isolation of conscience, "morality for morality's sake," instead of "for life's sake," or "to the glory of God." And it may be something genuine and sound, and a vision bigger than his own, which the "prophet" is up against in the people.

Is Jesus right but not reasonable in this sense ? Appearances are against him. His own generation crucified him. His own family treated him as mad. The fact that it should be such a prevailing judgment among plain folk to-day is a strong argument. Yet it is simply not the case. Obviously many seeking to follow him have gone off the rails in this very way. And there's little doubt that his claim is pretty commonly presented in preaching in a form that lends itself to the idea, so that people go away feeling that it's all terrifically true and heroically right, but not for them. But when we look at the figure of Jesus himself, and listen to his talk, and the tone of his talk, the strongest impression we get may well be of his

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reasonableness. It is a word that would come of itself to our lips even though we were not looking for that quality. Nothing could be more unlike the strained, distorted attitude of the visionary or the doctrinaire. In all the oppositions of the narrative we see him standing for what's human, what's reasonable, what's shingly sane, against what's unnatural and tortuous and unbalanced. Over against the Pharisees there never was anyone who made faith in God so reasonable, searching out every possible natural and human way of making men feel for themselves what God must be like. Against money-greed we hear his voice appealing to common sense and clear judgment, warning men, sometimes rallying them, about the folly and illusion of the hypertrophy of a natural instinct, and the waste it can make of life.

What he teaches is always for rightness of life and fullness of life and happiness and health of life, that human life may be what it ought to be, and "that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." The saying "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" must be taken as in the same connection and as having almost the same meaning. He doesn't summon men to some flawless perfection, "Cold as a mountain, in its star-pitched tent," but to positive, human qualities that are desirable and practicable down on the level, our level: frankness, humility, appreciativeness, love.

One of the last things that people sometimes

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realise about Jesus is that you can depend on him in any situation, not only for the loftiest judgment, but for the most completely sane and workable and fruitful judgment too. Never can he even be forced or trapped into the austere loftiness that is barren.

Of course it is quite true that even along Jesus' way life won't be always spontaneously right and happy. There may come at any moment the hard choice, and the thing we can only do with a struggle. That experience came to Jesus himself. And, when that happens, it is true that Jesus, with all the weight of his wisdom and love, is on the side of our doing the right thing whatever the cost may be.

Is that unreasonable? There are two things to be said about it. First, that he would never want men to take the high and hard course blindly, in the spirit of "Theirs not to reason why. Theirs but to do and die." Only what one felt oneself, not only with conscience, but with all one's sense of life, to be the greater way, would he have us take. In the case of the rich young ruler an inner perception of this kind which he was already facing probably underlies the incident. His manner of receiving Jesus' word to him suggests that *he* did not feel it to be unreasonable, however it may sound to us or anyone who did not understand the situation. Even in those crises of choice that involve everything, we can believe that Jesus' way is the reasonable one. It will cost tremendously to follow it; but we have

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to remember that it will also cost tremendously not to follow it. A life that accepts the Cross may be not only more right but more reasonable than one that lives on in pain and shame, and having robbed the world of that by which it might have been helped.

The other thing that might be said is that failing wouldn't mean that we were too poor stuff for Jesus' world. We are on quite a wrong tack if we think he took for granted a world of heroes and saints. There was no illusion in his love of men and his faith in their possibilities. Think of that extraordinarily sweet and patient thing he said to three of his disciples when they failed him badly on his last night: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Reasonableness becomes an inadequate word for such understanding, such sympathy and patience with human nature as it actually is.

V

JESUS CHRIST : II.—THE DRAMA OF CHRIST

“THE Drama of Christ,” as this chapter is entitled, may be understood to mean, in the original, literal sense of the word, “the things done” by him ; also, it may be taken as suggesting, according to the accepted sense, that Christ matters as the central figure of a great drama which has direct and symbolical meanings for mankind. The great dramas of the poetic imagination, Greek or Shakespearean tragedy, in some episode of human experience display life in its essence. In the intense light they concentrate we become aware, through the particular, of the universal, see, perhaps,

A wave of the great waves of Destiny
Convulsed. . . .

At the least, for almost anyone, the life and death of Jesus offer a supreme spectacle of that order. One of the ideals of drama is to make of the beholders more than spectators, to make them feel as if, though passive, they were participants in it. (Modern experimenters have sometimes tried devices to secure such an effect). In a special way this is exactly what very many have felt about the drama of Christ.

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We could venture a guess at what certain readers are thinking at this moment. They are thinking we have got to the point at last where they will have to part company with us. Thus far, it may be, they have been able to come in sincerest agreement. Getting down to their own surest convictions, and letting loose their own finest intuitions, they find the result coming out surprisingly close to a Christian view of the world and life. And what has been said in the previous chapter about Jesus indicates pretty much what they feel about him ; but, they would want to add, indicates *all* (as far as extent is concerned), reaches the limits of what they feel. If this were really all, how easy and inevitable it would be to be a "Christian." If this were faith ; as Stevenson put it, "God, if this were enough !" They have a premonition, however, since it appears to be a "Christian" position that is being evolved, that there is still to come what they won't be able to stomach, what Bernard Shaw separated out and stigmatised as "Salvationism" ; or, at any rate, something of that sort.

Now this is not a book of "Apologetic." The writer feels not the slightest onus to work for a case and get as much as possible of the weak and doubtful elements of it accepted. We are out together after what is most true, and there's not a reason in the world why any of us should burden himself with what isn't vital and valuable and wanted. If there is any feeling of reluctance against even entering on the subjects you foresee

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coming up, let us have it out in the open and examine the nature of it. Two lines of objection can be surmised.

First, you may feel an impatience of the mass of theology that has been spun about Jesus, practically none of it coming first-hand from himself, very unlike him in its tenor, and often obscuring him and losing sight of him altogether. From Jesus himself one gets pure, plain daylight, in his teaching, or in his dealings with persons ; but as soon as one passes beyond himself to the structure that others have reared upon him or about him one is likely to find oneself either among tortuous reasonings, where one no more breathes the air of reality than in the underground burrowings of a mole, or, in another direction, in a world of abnormal, over-emotionalised experience.

There is only too large a measure of truth in this opinion. Theologies have tended to care only about the drama of Christ, or the plot of the drama, we might say : God becoming man ; a cosmic transaction carried through at the Cross ; the Resurrection and Ascension, and the epilogue, still to be, of the Second Coming. And the danger has been very evident indeed of becoming so absorbed in interpretation of the action, and speculation and commentary on it, as to lose sight of the character and personality of its central figure. The first of the theologians, Paul, doesn't escape this danger. Judging by his Epistles, he made no attempt to present to men any impression of Jesus, and hardly ever even quotes his

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words. Yet his burrowings can't be altogether mole-like, for, when he does break surface periodically, it is to come out on the roof of the world, and several times with speech that must be counted among the most sublime of all human utterance.

We could agree, using Paul himself as an argument, that it might have been far better had men never striven to reduce their view of the Christ-drama, and the sense of their own participation in it, to doctrines and dogmas, but rather left them in the high realm of poetic apprehension, which feels no urgent need of definitions and logical demonstrations, but cares only about being as close as possible to the living truth, and leaves its ends loose, rather than pretend to tie up the Infinite into parcels. But this is as far as possible from saying that there is no reality demanding to be faced and reckoned with beyond our valuation of Jesus' teaching and personality.

The appeal to Jesus himself, against what has been said and written about him, is ignoring the fact that he himself consciously became a symbolic figure. He foretold the Cross in that way. It is true that all through his ministry his appeal to men had been most scrupulously the daylight appeal of the plain word of truth and the pure deed of love; he had refrained even from any of those dramatic acts of symbolism so often resorted to by the Jewish prophets. Yet in the last days he deliberately witnesses in symbol. We see him,

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rather surprisingly, accepting, even planning, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem—the first part of a symbol completed in the procession outward from the town a few days later. The weeping over Jerusalem, and the casting out of the money-changers are unlike the Jesus we have known just in the quality they have of symbolic action. In the Last Supper this new way of offering himself as a challenge to men's apprehension and feeling reaches its culmination. It is true, of course, that allowance may have to be made for later interpretations that have coloured the narrative. But however this affects points of detail, no one can resist the impression that Jesus saw himself and presented himself more and more in this aspect. History turns into drama before our eyes. Throughout the closing scenes we feel that the Voice bit by bit falls silent, and leaves us more and more to look. The meanings are becoming too big for words, and more than what is localised in particular place and time.

In short, it was Jesus himself who made the Christ-drama. In their contemplation of it and speculation about it men have sometimes lost sight of himself. We have tried to guard against that danger by putting first our valuation of his teaching and personality. That must remain an essential part. Without it the drama becomes a mere theological scenario, cast round a lay-figure, and the meanings which Jesus left to men to find may become terribly unlike himself in word and spirit. But we are clean off the mark if we think

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we can stick to Jesus and escape what the human mind and heart have grappled with so passionately in the drama of Christ.

The other line along which objection may be operating in you is very different : not the unreality of the subject-matter, but its unsuitability to yourself. The Christian religion centres round, or professes to centre round, intense and profound experiences, desperate needs and ineffable deliverances. These experiences are proclaimed in doctrines, they are given rapturous expression in hymns, but you're not aware of any point of contact which they have with you. They seem to your eyes an almost ludicrous misfit for the rows of genteel folk who sit in the pews of churches. However, you don't want to say anything about that. All that you do know with honesty and certainty is that it may be big stuff, even glorious stuff, but you can't do anything with it, you've got no place to put it. "I'm just the usual sort of chap," you say. "I know and you know the sort of man I am, and what life is like to me. I can see myself at work or at games ; I can see myself setting off every morning, office during the day, a novel or a theatre or some jollification in the evenings ; I can see myself along with friends, and I can go over in my mind just the sort of things we'd talk about. That's the way my life is made up. That's the man I am. Anybody can see it. Now what on earth do you think I've got to do with these vast solemn and passionate religious themes, or some profound

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soul-adventure you call 'Reconciliation'? I can go to church, of course, like lots of other people, and sing hymns about these things with simple heartiness and complete unreality, but I've no imaginable affinity for them, no need of them, no place to put them; they're not my size, not my style."

There's only one possible reply to this, and the gist of it is, in the briefest form, "You're a liar." Nobody is like that. You think you've made an effort to state the plain facts, all pretences and poses laid aside, but no man or woman has given a true account of himself or herself in such terms. It's only the surface of yourself you've described, the merest public surface. The real life is going on underneath all that. No one knows about it but yourself. And even you have forgotten all about it for the time being. To remind yourself, look at these remarks which we borrow from Mr Wells' latest novel:

"The streets are alive with people, grave, decorous-looking people. They pass intent upon their various businesses with an air of knowing exactly what they are and exactly what they are doing. And last night this self-possessed young woman bit her pillow and beat the air with clenched hands and cried, 'O God! O God! Shall I never escape?' And that grave and respectable gentleman with the gold-tipped cane stared out of his bedroom window at the dawn and wished and came near contriving another man dead."

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“ . . . This is what feels, this is what responds, this is what matters, this is what is. This is the life that in the daytime and commonly we hide from ourselves. The night is its time for revelation. Then for all our resistances we find ourselves taken and stripped and put upon the rack of these blundering contradictions of standards and desires. The angel and the ape appear. The morning finds us already most sedulously forgetting that dreadful interview with our bare selves. We dress, we examine our faces in the glass to be sure that we are masked before we risk the observation of our fellow-masqueraders.”

There is nothing new, of course, about these observations. They are too true and too universal to be new. They are just reminders.

The same passionate and profound themes that are on the lips of the great saints, and, for that matter, in some form or another, on the lips of all the great thinkers, all the great artists, all the great seekers of humanity are the themes that matter for you, and nothing less mighty is big enough to come into the realm of your own real life. The drama of Christ, and all its possible meanings will seem absurdly incongruous, on a surface look at your life. Of course it will. So will a great love-poem ; so will great music. But if you let them into the inner world of your own hungers, desires, conflicts, potentialities, they won't be out of keeping there. The greatness of such things is their very universality. Their cries or their song are a voice for every man, truer than his own.

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On the other hand there will be readers in a very different relation to the subject-matter of this chapter who are going to come, in the course of it, to a parting of ways. We are entering on questions on which people hold definitely different views, hold them strongly and in many cases feel that the differences are vital, as indeed the writer thinks they are. It is just possible that some may resent the method followed here when it enters this field. The danger of imposing an outlook isn't avoided merely by disowning the intention. A professedly individual view may seem to make the most insufferable of all assumptions of authority—that it is the only possible view which a man of sense can take. It becomes a question whether the treatment should not become more general, impartial and non-committal, to permit people to find their own beliefs. But there's no lack of books which serve in that way. The only use of this one is its effort to go for the centres of reality rather than walk about in their neighbourhood. To assume one's own feeling and convictions as a standard of what's real may seem unfair ; but to try to get beyond it is to be at sea, with no sense left of where the realities lie for oneself or the reader or anyone. Also, from the readers' point of view, it would seem better to have as a basis of thought or discussion (to agree with or diverge from) views actually held by somebody, rather than a more general and impersonal survey of the ground. Therefore we carry on as heretofore, only reiterating, for what it is worth,

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that an individual position is being stated. This having been made so explicit, perhaps there will be the less need constantly to insert qualifying phrases—"the writer feels," "in his view," etc. These can be more than ever understood.

The Cross and the Atonement.

As has been suggested, nearly every one who gave himself the chance would be conscious of an impressiveness, a significance, a symbolism, if you like, in the fact of Christ crucified that make it more than merely an intensely moving page of biography or history.

Consider, for example, what a recent writer has pointed out, that the conflict lay between Christ and the world at its best without him. In that ancient world there were hundreds of religions—at one end of the scale gross, cruel, dark superstitions; at the other end of the scale one single faith that was a pure monotheism and at the same time full of moral earnestness. And of all possible religions, it was Judaism that crucified Christ. Similarly, there were hundreds of different governments and social organisations—barbarous despotisms, corrupt and effete cities, but, towering above all, one great unifying, civilising State, one Empire whose name stood for justice and integrity. And of all possible secular powers, it was Rome into whose hands Jesus' fate was placed. How little it would have signified if some dark and bloodthirsty fanaticism had seized on Jesus for its altar, as it

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might have seized on anyone ; or if some tribal council or some despotic sultan had capriciously ordered him to be slain ! But how deeply significant the conflict becomes—not accidental but essential—when it lies with the rule of Rome and the religion of the Jews. The Cross does not reveal a chance upsurging of the ancient world's worst. This thing was not done in a corner. The conflict between the world-order and the order for which Christ stood was staged on the summit of the ancient world's achievement.

It was even a conflict which had been perceived in theory by men of very deep insight. Great thinkers, as long before and as far apart as Plato and the author of Isaiah liii, had foreseen and foretold the necessity of it and remarkably described the features of it. Perfect sonship of God in such a world as this involves a conflict that must come to a head. It has to meet face to face what contradicts it in the spirit of man, and what challenges and threatens to annul it in the natural order. "It behoved the Christ to suffer." Conceivably, of course, Jesus might have lived and died without the crisis having come. But that would only have left the conflict inherent for the Christ-faith and the Christ-life with no sign or token of the issue.

Every one can feel something of this symbolic impressiveness of Christ crucified—an historical drama that is in some sense eternal. But in Christian experience it has also had an intense personal significance which we now have to

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inquire into. What do we understand by "Atonement" ?

The word is derived from "at one," and if it were still allowed to mean simply what it says, as it originally did in Elizabethan times, it could be one of the great universal words common to all religions, a summing-up of the need of every man and woman on the face of the earth. But since becoming a theological term it has undergone a displacement of meaning. It has come to signify not a state but the transaction by which that state is reached ; and then, further, one particular theory of that transaction. So that now when the verb "atone" is used, one expects the preposition "for" after it ; in common usage "atonement" suggests the idea of "compensation." Because of this distortion it might be better to use another word, such as "reconciliation," as is often done. Or the word "harmony" would convey, in the vocabulary of our own time, exactly the literal meaning of "Atonement," without the special twist which the trend of theology gave it.

If, having discussed the point, we stick to the word (which is a very good one) it is, of course, in its full original wideness. Not only, indeed, must we refuse to shut it up to certain channels of interpretation ; we may even, at the very start, have to shut it off from them. Already we have found a faith in God and a thought of His nature, which Jesus has awakened, and there can be no going back on them. No interpretation of the Cross, no matter by whom it is made, that con-

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tradicts or displaces or qualifies the picture of God conveyed, for example, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, can be acceptable. This rules out at a stroke every attempt to explain the strange power of the Cross by imagining it to have placated God, or to have fulfilled a necessary condition which enabled Him to forgive, or change His attitude to men.

We can go further, and say that any doctrine of the Cross which binds it up with the forgiveness of sin is *inadequate*. The Gospel of Jesus really makes "forgiveness" almost a meaningless word. We follow Jesus in using it, but we often fail to notice that he used it only to stretch it so far that it practically burst. Forgiveness is a conception that belongs to a system of justice concerned with merits and rights and rewards and punishments. It represents a certain amount of play, of "charitable inconsistency," introduced into that system. Jesus, preaching an entirely different order as God's order, and the true way for men to live with one another, took over the word, as a point of contact with current ideas, but he expanded it unto "seventy times seven"—until it is so great that it no longer is a point. We can use the word, as in the Lord's Prayer, but only to remind ourselves to accept and live in an order in which forgiveness is not the exception but the rule itself. It is not a bit rare (as Jesus pointed out) for ordinary men and women to be in a relation to one another in which there is no question of forgiveness between them; the human father in

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the parable won't let his son even mention it. Still more is it an inadequate word in its ordinary associations to use of a God whose whole purpose is to redeem and bless. "Forgiveness" has probably been the most dangerous word in the Christian vocabulary. It has constantly dragged men's minds back to that order of ideas in which it takes on great importance as being the exception and not the rule.

Whatever the Atonement may be, then, it is not a transaction which changed God's attitude or enabled Him to forgive. Such an interpretation would nullify all that Jesus led men to believe of God; the rest of his life would become unnecessary, and his teaching would not be true teaching. Atonement has nothing to do with compensating for sin. We can understand how thousands of years of ritual sacrifice should inevitably shape men's language and supply them with metaphors which they refined and spiritualised. But those metaphors don't come naturally to us; they are far more misleading to us than to those who applied them. (Thus much comparatively modern theology which supposed itself to be based on Paul would have made that apostle's hair stand on end.) We can share the experience of reconciliation which, from the earliest times, Christians have ardently sought to describe and explain, but we must re-state it for ourselves.

It will be the quickest way, and the way most likely to be useful to readers of all sorts, if we speak as if particularly to those who are in this attitude

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and at this stage. Those, that's to say, for whom the Cross does mean something, who are deeply interested in this matter, for whom it is a focal point of feeling, and a point, also, at which their whole thinking about God and life should come into focus, but who have not been able to get it clear, and, in spite of all they have eagerly read and heard, remain perplexed and unsatisfied. There is a reason for their dissatisfaction. Most of them are at the point we have now reached of having rejected the old substitutionary doctrine. That doctrine was definite, and was big—cosmic—involving nothing less than the placating of God. When it has been discarded as intolerable to reason and feeling and conscience, the difficulty is to find a form of statement equally big *and* equally definite.

On the one hand it is possible to speak of the Cross and its meaning for man in the biggest possible words. But when someone does this, with soaring thought and feeling, it is hard for another to catch on. The language seems vague, and hearers are left, perhaps eager and excited, but all the more perplexed and anxious to get hold of something definite. In some of the modern books that have finely recreated the personality and life of Jesus, all is beautifully lucid and appealing until the writer approaches the Cross, and then we may feel as if we had come to a cloud of magic smoke.

On the other hand, if something definite is wanted, the way to it seems obvious. It is just for

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every one to ask himself what his own experience is. What does the Cross do for you ? What does it make you feel ? What happens ? We should only have to look into our own experience to find out in the most real and definite way if and how the Cross makes Atonement. Undoubtedly many, thrown back on themselves, must have tried this. And if they have not found satisfaction there we can guess at the reason. When they came to examine their experience, all that they could definitely say seemed too meagre. And therefore they turned again outside and looked round for somebody to tell them. We do not blame such a feeling. It is a symptom that itself expresses part of the truth. Our analysis of our experience is quite likely to be an inadequate account of that experience. And we have an instinct that the Cross is such a big thing that our experience itself touches only a small part of its significance.

Yet this last is the way of reality; if the Atonement is not through a change in God but through a change in us, it is in ourselves we must look for a description of it. And it is the way consistent with the method we are trying to follow in this book. We would urge that all who are perplexed on this matter should not go about looking for a theory to satisfy them, but should fasten hard on the question : What is the Cross to *me* ? and not be dismayed if the answer begins to come in terms very small and unsensational, compared with the language of Paul or of familiar hymns. Go on until you come to a point when

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you, too, yourself, want to talk in big language which another, possibly, would not understand. Thus :—

We can't see, perhaps, that the Cross brings in any new, momentous effect for us. It only intensifies things. It intensifies Jesus for us ; it intensifies evil. It brings things to a sort of creative climax. There need not be anything unique in that. Many a violent deed has that kind of effect. People live under an unjust tyranny and submit to it and accept it, and then, one day, comes a deed that makes a breaking-point ; men are in the streets everywhere, not only with weapons in their hands, but with something awakened, something newborn in their spirits. That has often happened in history.

But there is more that we feel and can identify. The bearing of Jesus is an arresting element in the event—his silence before Pilate, his passivity in the hands of the soldiers, his refusal to answer violence with violence either in action or feeling. We may find ourselves repeating the words of the prophetic vision : "As a lamb to the slaughter." There need not, perhaps, be anything unique in the effect of this feature either. The undefending submissiveness of the victim, through helplessness, or because violence is not in his nature, always "makes sin exceeding sinful," and such suffering (in child-victims, for example, or in slave-victims) has ever been one of the most potent redemptive forces in the world for that very reason.

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At this point, very tentatively, let us ask ourselves as to our attitude. Are we merely looking on at this drama, or have we a feeling that it touches us more closely than just as spectators? Against whom, against what is the emotion that is stirred in us directed? There is always in such cases a tendency for it to discharge itself outwards. In imagination we side with Jesus and grow hot against his enemies. In so far as his Cross is an eternal drama our feeling is intensified against those forms of evil in our own day which we perceive to be continuous with the forces which crucified him. But does our feeling not begin to turn inwards also? One of the rather unreal-sounding things we've sometimes heard said is that our sin crucifies Christ. But is it not a thought that would arrive of itself in some degree? We can't really feel, perhaps, that we should have yelled for the death of Jesus, and yet, when things came to a head, Jesus was all alone on one side, and on the other side were not only vile men but all sorts of people of ordinary standards and outlook. Self-revelation comes. We are not, after all, able to identify ourselves with Jesus and his order when we see him on the Cross. By that in us which is continuous with the world's lack of faith and lack of love we are against him. The evil which is intensified, and whose ultimate nature is revealed, is in ourselves also.

Let us return to the drama, in which we are now more than spectators, and see whether we have even yet stated all we can definitely say we actually

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feel. Are we altogether satisfied, for example, with the word "passivity," which we used just now? It is rather a negative word, and what we are really aware of is not negative; it is a stillness of Jesus *being Jesus* more intensely than at any other moment. "As a lamb to the slaughter," was our first impression—like some powerless, innocent thing in the hands of the grim ruling forces of this world. "Isn't he going to fight?" we want to ask. But then, it may chance, something in us suddenly says, "*That is fighting.*" It is an impression that can come, as it came to one fighting man who looked on.

And this, for the writer, is the point, as nearly as one can analyse one's experience and fix the point, where things begin to happen and it is no longer meagreness of impression that is the trouble. One is not seeing now a lamb at the slaughter, but a lamb on the throne of the universe—in some dim way one is regarding a power, the mightiest that can be conceived, a conquering thing. That is new and momentous. Nothing in the narrative until now could have given us quite this sense of a power at the heart of the Christ-gospel and the Christ-life and the Christ-death fit to be the supreme creative and redemptive power behind all things, by which we are known and loved and held. But in a flash it links up with all that narrative, and with what Jesus was ever seeking to tell us in all sorts of ways. *That is God*—we could know it in words, but never as we know it in this blinding brightness, and never so penetratingly

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related to our sin and all our humble sense of the truth about ourselves.

This is only the beginning of what we may have to know or tell when we speak out of our experience. Why "atonement"? Merely to see a truth that has been there all the time, however wonderful and thrilling, can't make much difference when the actual facts and conditions of life are going to continue the same. But sometimes it might. If you were a newcomer in a school or workshop, fighting your own battles, it would make a complete change if you suddenly discovered that there was somebody who had had his eye on you all the time, knew about the struggles, knew about the injustices. A youngster actually would have the whole complexion of his life changed by knowing that. And this truth that we are viewing is the greatest possible truth of the kind which can change the nature of life. It goes to the very root of things. It gives us a new reading of the world itself, and our own existence, and all our experience. There's probably no other thought or theory that men can have which would be great enough to do it, or strong enough to take the strains. Most of such efforts either say nothing to help, or else they try to say something very optimistic and comforting, but with a voice which falters and dies away in, say, the trenches or the slums; or some night, when you're sleeping out, and lie looking up into the infinite universe of stars, it seems trivial and tawdry, a forlorn little bit of human invention. But this sight of God in

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Christ upon the Cross burns brighter in the dark places and the precipitous places and is a great enough thought not to be put out of countenance even when, with the earth behind your back, you are alone in space with the stars. If it becomes a truth for you at all it will be strong enough to take any strain, big enough not to be dwarfed in any setting, and real enough to interlock with the hungers and needs and strivings of your most real inner life.

How it will make you experience "atonement" will depend on how it finds you. If sin's your trouble, if you're sick with yourself, you'll know something of that choking silence of feeling which Jesus leaves us to imagine in the Prodigal when he was discovering what kind of home and what kind of father had been his all the time. If it's solitariness, or the oppression of futility; if, in the long thoughts of the night-time, you have the sense of being no more than a bit of drift-stuff in the pathless wastes of the Universe or the noisy chaos of life, then this is such a truth as makes nigh those who are far off. The chaos becomes a harmony. You are aware that you are being held and guided by what is at the centre of all reality, as any one of a million planetoids is held by their sun. You can do your bit in the world, and it links on. And, whether you do it or not, you are not an outsider, an orphan; you are made nigh.

Atonement is a universal and ultimate need of the spirit of man—to be at one, to find not enmity but reconciliation, not emptiness but intimacy,

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not discord but some master-harmony. Christianity sets on the throne of the Universe a truth which brings it to pass. Do you know any other that can? Is this "salvationism"? Take even the hymns that are commonly sung in English churches. We hold no brief for them. Frankly, considered as poetry, even the best of them are hardly more than provincial "Poet's Corner" kind of stuff. (It is a strange and reproachful fact that English letters, so rich in lovely and immortal poems inspired by human love, should have such meagre or mediocre poetry to give us of the love of God—or, to put it more widely, that Christian art, with a theme so intensified and enlarged, should have produced no religious lyrical poetry comparable with the Hebrew psalms.) But even these hymns, which easily seem over-emotionalised, and not in good enough verse to carry it off, we can begin to understand. No one could feel contemptuous of them if he realised what they are about. Here are men of no great genius, or no genius at all, hymning that same universal, crowning experience that we hear the great voices dreaming of, thirsting for, seeking after. The man who, when he surveyed the wondrous Cross, felt,

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

really knew more than Wagner about that which the ecstatic 'Reconciliation' music at the end of

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Parsifal, Wagner's last great work, tries to depict.
Another hymn,

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,

is like a translation into Christian terms of that ode of Schiller's, "To Heavenly Joy," which Beethoven aspired to translate into music, and which he did ultimately set in the last movement of his last symphony.¹ The Atonement, and the transformation of life that it may bring, can't be dismissed as an emotional aberration. The presentations of it may have been often childish and crude, the rationalisations of it incredibly forced and fantastic. But the experience itself is a finding of what all men seek.

Now, quite possibly, this discussion, which started down on the ground floor with you trying to get clear as to what you found in your own mind and feeling, has seemed, at a certain point, to go off into the air, with the large vague talk you

¹ Why, by the by, has this hymn never been set to the great Beethoven tune? The metre is right; the tune, although of course it must be transposed, would need little or no adaptation in one of its forms for unison singing with organ accompaniment. Charles Wesley's hymn is a central expression in song of the Christian faith. Beethoven's choral tune was an effort at a culminating expression of his faith. They are both made for mass utterance. One would have thought that for hymnologists they would have simply rushed together, and given us something we have not got at present, something that would be like a national anthem of Christianity (the "Old Hundredth" is not Christian; the "Te Deum" is not for the people because it is not in verse, nor has it a recognised "proper tune").

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have so often met before. When another speaks for you on this matter the result may well seem intangibility and overstatement. Yet if you begin, as was suggested, to put together as sincerely and definitely as you can the elements of what you feel, it is likely that you too will go off the map, and be looking for the biggest words you can find, at somewhere near the same point where it began to happen in the foregoing. First there is just the intensification before your eyes of Jesus *being* Jesus; on that, the surprise and sadness of beholding what he was, helpless and lamb-like in the hands of the rude forces of this world; next, the dawning impression that this is not passivity, but a passionately striving and creative activity; and then the realisation that if this is power in action, it is the very highest conceivable, a key to what is behind all life, a revelation of God. As soon as the question, "Isn't he going to fight?" begins to change to the conviction, "That *is* fighting," keep an eye on yourself. Somewhere there lies the meaning of the Atonement for you. The Cross doesn't reconcile man to God and all God's order by compensating for sin, but by revealing to us such a God that we feel ourselves known and loved and held across all failure and unworthiness, and can humbly and joyfully accept such knowledge and such love and such holding.

The Victory over Death.

Has the Resurrection a vital place in the faith and vision of life we possess through Jesus? There

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are many who believe it happened without a notion as to how or why it matters for the life of man or for their own life. Like old Caspar in the poem they take over the verdict, " 'twas a famous victory "; but why it had to be, and what atom of difference it has made they would be hard put to it to say.

Others, perhaps, may feel, as we have already surmised, that they have no use for it. Life doesn't need any victory. Life's all right if one plays the game and lives straight and has courage and cheerfulness—unless, of course, in rather rare and exceptional tragic cases. Jesus himself in Galilee preached a right and happy way of life that asked only simplicity and sincerity and trust and love. If we live as he taught we shall be on top of things, and it won't be in the power of anything that can happen to hurt our soul or upset our faith; there's no need for the drama of Calvary and Easter to justify life as God has made it.

But if that is our position it is because we have never, in thought or actuality, been closely enough at grips with the facts of life. If we con over the great spirits of humanity—men of all races and ages, Hebrews, ancient Greeks like Æschylus and Euripides, an artist like Michelangelo, our own Shakespeare—one and all we find them ultimately confronting, like a wall of dark, the enigma of life. They have their noble vision of life, but somewhere and in some aspect it is brought up short and breaks down as a gospel.

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“ Regard the godlike nobility there can be in the human spirit ! ” they cry. They make us see it and thrill to it. And then, because they are men of truth, they have to say, “ Regard it suffer. Regard it crushed by Fate.”

“ Behold beauty, the eternal reality ! ” they cry. And they show it to us, and then with agony must confess that it passes and the place thereof shall know it no more.

“ See the immortal glory of love, conquering all ! ” they cry, and then make us weep to see it desolate.

Shakespeare, in his last play (symbolising himself in the character of Prospero laying down his powers) speaks the ultimate word, with very great sweetness but unfathomable sadness :

Like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

In the last issue Shakespeare can't believe in his own art ; his mighty creations are no more than “ unsubstantial pageants ” ; and the world and life itself pass into the void also.

Even the ordinary man or woman, who doesn't from day to day probe so deep nor ask so much, sooner or later comes there too. Somehow,

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sometime each one of us comes face to face with that wall of dark. And the more we have believed in goodness, the more we have loved a companion, the more we have clung to joy, the more terrible and oppressive it stands. There's no explaining it away. There's a tragedy behind the best that is not accidental, that is not avoidable, that is not exceptional. It's no use saying life is all right, when, if we go far enough in any direction, we only come up against that ultimate wall of dark.

This grim challenge comes to a climax in Christ, because in him are the highest realities that the human spirit has to behold and believe in. If Jesus dies and is gone like a sound in the air, all faith is vain. If Jesus too, being such as we have seen him and judged him, goes down, all loveliness and graciousness and rightness of life go down with him. The challenge becomes so poignant and terrible that faith must either rise to meet it, or sink down and hold its peace for ever. Either Jesus belongs to eternity, or there is nothing but illusion anywhere.

All we can say is that Christ, from the first, has carried men's faith into and across the dark. "Christ lives" is not a part of Christian doctrine which grows outworn, and can be discarded as no longer needed. The last scene of the Christ-drama doesn't stage one of those "famous victories" which there was no call for and which make no practical difference to anybody. It means that the human spirit is lifted up to

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answer the unanswerable challenge and cast off the oppression of what ultimately denies and annuls it and all it holds to.

Does this hinge on the fact of an empty tomb ? Does it stand or fall with the trustworthiness of external evidence that must be weighed and judged as in some scientific investigation ? Never. Paul's vision of the risen Christ had nothing to do with an empty tomb which he'd never seen and wouldn't have believed in. Whenever this faith is vitally held the real force behind it is a valuation of Jesus. And no one could ever be lifted into it by mere evidence of an earthly physical miracle, any more than some convinced believer in materialisation at séances need have his moral world transformed by them. (More will be said on this point presently.) It is a spiritual judgment. There comes a point when faith must go forward, or go back and give up everything. It is Jesus himself, being what he was, and as we have come to see him, who carries our faith over the ultimate wall of dark, and enables us to believe that the things of the spirit are the abiding things.

The Divinity of Christ.

When Jesus has been the Way, the Truth and the Life to us, when through him we know and love God and find reconciliation with God's order, we shall want to sum up our thought of himself. He who has been so wonderfully the guide of our faith becomes, in the world we look at, one of the

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chief objects of it. We have to meet the question, "Who say ye that I am?" not at the outset, but ultimately.

The Christian mind has felt that this is the critical question, something like a watershed, at which faith must come down on one side or the other as Christian or non-Christian. We want all the clearness we can get on it. But the majority of ordinary folk are hopelessly befogged about it. Others, indeed, see the issue as absolutely sharp and unequivocal, whether they come down on one side of it or the other, but only because they've got a completely mistaken notion of what the issue is; they are so far from the real watershed that they are not even in the mist that hangs over it.

There is no point at which the Church laboured so strenuously to get definition and destroy ambiguity. It seems curious that the result should have been either to land people in a tangle of complexity, or force them to a knife-stroke that cuts the knot but destroys all the meaning of it. The truth is that it is not possible to get the kind of clearness that the Church sought. The big thing that the Church had to assert was, "Jesus Christ is God." Now the reality for which those words stood, as anyone actually reached it in experience, was a religious conviction about Jesus Christ. Putting it in the simplest, yet completely adequate way, it is that in him we have to do with God. Just as it is God our minds reach out to through all the world about us He has made; just as it is God we are aware of in the

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moral perceptions and pressures of our inner world ; so again it is God we are meeting in the qualities and affinities of human personality as we see it in Jesus, and God whose nature and attitude are revealed in the Christ-drama. It is a conviction which might burst on one sudden and complete, as when climbing one comes to a crest, and a new prospect opens before one's eyes. In one's own experience it could be a dividing line like a watershed. " Jesus Christ is God " might be a man's spontaneous utterance for this illumination, and might be so understood by another who shared it. But the Church, wishing to set up the supreme test-point here, and to use it for classifying men as believers or heretics, found it extraordinarily difficult ground on which to formulate something concrete and objective. The fact to be declared was, " Jesus Christ is God," but not this alone. It had to be asserted without losing hold of the truth, " Jesus Christ was a man." There need be no difficulty in this as long as one is just feeling round in words trying to find any kind of indication of the faith that is in one. But as soon as the declaration is raised from a secondary to a primary place, as soon as it is made authoritative and definitive, it is obviously unmanageable. It has an irresistible tendency to simplify out as, " Jesus Christ was not man but God." The reason for this tendency is the desire to say as much as possible and as emphatically as possible. You can't say anything categorically distinctive about the divinity. You can only get

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at it negatively, by diminishing or denying the humanity. On this view Christ is divine because he was not limited as we are, because he was not bound by the natural laws that bind us, because his birth and death were not like man's. That is to say, what set out to be a positive declaration has turned into a negative one. The effort to make one great Christian conviction concrete and definitive has simply resolved itself into a denial of another essential Christian belief about Jesus. So, as said above, those who find the issue clear-cut, and are impatient of putting it into more than a sentence, and suspicious of subterfuge, are not *at* the real issue. They are making to themselves a negative definition; they are saying that Jesus was not a man as we are men. That is simple enough, and definite enough; but it is not Christian. It is not merely technically a heresy, but it would actually undercut our relationship to Jesus and his worth to us.

Although the supreme conviction of the Christian faith is concerned, it is simply not possible to establish any sort of test-question here, for ourselves or others, that has reality. For example, "Did Jesus differ from other men in degree or in kind?" has sometimes been asked as if it were a key-question. But it only puzzles Christian people, because to answer "In degree," seems to give inadequate expression to what they feel, yet it is, of course, the true answer, the only possible answer. To say that he differed in kind would do violence not only to their reason but to an

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essential part of their faith. In every such question, however ingeniously or elaborately contrived, the gist will always be, "Was Jesus a man, or was he not a man?" And, shut up to that issue, the traditional theologian is bound to reply, as the Christian disciple will passionately reply, "He was a man." Whatever remains for the moment unexpressed, that is vital.

Many people, particularly of the younger generation, are confused, perplexed or repelled by the whole question. Really the confusion is in the minds of those who have so falsely simplified it. We can sympathise with them in as far as they have been striving to seize on some expression for a deep and real conviction, or even for mystical experience. But they must beware of asserting a positive conviction in what is, explicitly or implicitly, a negative form—that Jesus was not human, because that makes the whole position unreal to others, many of whom might want to say quite as much of Jesus Christ, yet cannot believe, and don't want to believe, that he was not a man. Others again, who are not in sight of the judgment they are trying to express, accept the issue as being what they seem to imply ("human or not human"), and not merely decide that they are not Christians, but that it is impossible for any rational person to be a Christian. Any number of people actually have the impression that the Christian faith is fantastic and superstitious in its very essentials, and misconception of the point we are dealing with here has been mainly responsible

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for it. The case is exactly the opposite; the Christian appeal is to the sense of truth and reality of any man using every faculty he has got. If and where it seems strange it is only because it leads us out beyond the habitual range of our thought; but it doesn't want to substitute faith for reason, or mystery for knowledge, as far as ever reason and knowledge will take us.

Only yourself can know whether your faith rises to belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ or not. It may be that up to now you've been trying to force it, or have failed to force it, or refused to force it on the false issue we've been talking about. Start all over again. Think of the first time the positive conviction was ever expressed, long before there was any Christian theology—the answer given to that question with which we started this section by a man who had been living with Jesus: "Thou art the Christ." The real issue might shape itself something like this in your mind: Whether God *meant* Jesus, sent him to be to us and all men such as we see him (we might say "specially sent" if that didn't suggest that other saints and prophets only "happened"): whether you feel that the inmost truth about the nature of God is revealed in him: whether something of Jesus becomes strangely mixed in with your thought of the planning and making of all that is (as John said, "Without him was not anything made that was made"), so that for you that "immortal hand or eye" that framed even the fearful symmetry of the tiger takes on the

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touch or the glance of Jesus : whether, again, in another realm, he is associated for you with the Power and the Will that seem to be trying to express themselves through you (as Paul said, "Christ liveth in me"). Even these feelers are put forward very tentatively, and are not to be taken as test-questions, decisive one way or the other. You are best left to formulate your conviction in your own words. When Peter spoke in response to Jesus he spoke as a Jew, using his own vocabulary of words and ideas. You yourself will know whether, out of your own world, you are making essentially the same reply to that question which the fact of Jesus Christ puts to the spirit of man.

Let us also say that an answer like this is one we must rise to. It can only come as the gathering into a focus of all our impression and experience of Jesus, and projecting it further into the plan of the universe than we ordinarily send our thoughts. If we are uncertain of what we can honestly say, if we are afraid of overstatement of what we feel about Jesus, perhaps the difficulty is merely that we are asking ourselves to think in bigger ways than we are accustomed to. Any truth that goes rather beyond the ordinary practical range of our thoughts is apt to seem strange and incredible. It seems incredible that a piece of stone should have a structure like an infinite universe of stars. It's open to you to say you don't believe it. But the matter wouldn't rest there. You'd be asked, "What's your alternative idea ?" And you'd find,

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when you went into it, that the objection to any alternative idea is precisely that it is far more incredible and far more irreconcilable with the facts.

Don't misinterpret a feeling of strangeness at having to face wonderfully great and far-reaching thoughts as an adverse verdict spoken by your sense of truth. Don't let yourself stop at saying you can't believe such cosmic things of Christ. You have to follow out what is involved in the alternative—a universe in which Jesus just "happened along." And you are likely to find it far more incredible and irreconcilable with the simple facts you are familiar with and do accept, and most of all with the fact of Jesus himself.

The Virgin Birth and the Empty Tomb.

What is our relation to these beliefs? If they are rated as questions of fact the evidence for them is simply not such as can prove them. Therefore we have not used them as foundation-stones. The essentials of the faith we have worked out would not stand or fall with them. But we have suggested that, in cases where they are held with strong conviction, they follow from a valuation of Jesus.

We have left open the question of whether they would follow in the same way for us. In a full and frank survey of the ground it is inevitable that we shall come to that question. Even though we are interested only in making a positive creed of the essentials we ourselves are certain of, it is

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impossible not to ask ourselves what we feel about these beliefs that have had so much emphasis laid on them from the days when the Gospels in their present form came to be written.

When we speak of these beliefs *following*, we mean there would be a readiness to believe that Jesus, being what he was, could not have been born in the normal human way, and that the body he had used could not decay and be mixed again with the common things of earth. In the ancient world that was one of the natural forms which the valuation of Jesus would take. Faith would inevitably and spontaneously have expressed itself in this way at stage after stage, even if no traditions had been handed down. So it still may, and now more than ever these convictions will depend upon this factor, because we realise better than our fathers that the textual and historical evidence is not able to take the weight off it. (The birth narratives have marks of being afterthoughts—consider the genealogy in Matt. i, tracing the descent of Jesus through Joseph ; we hear nothing of the miraculous birth from Jesus himself, or through all the rest of the narrative. The accounts of the Resurrection are not in agreement. The real awakening of the disciples seems to have come only after an interval of some weeks.)

We have to consider then, each for himself, whether our faith moves on to these convictions. A deep and passionate faith in the spiritual truth of the Incarnation may feel that it must have some corresponding physical channel or opening

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to make room for it. At some point the physical chain of cause and effect (of human heredity, for example) must be broken for God to send Christ into the world. And the overwhelming sense of the victory of Christ may find it intolerable that death should have even his body.

We have to recall also the warning about our tendency to recoil from the abnormal when, as a matter of fact, we are inquiring so deeply into reality that no alternative can look like "common-sense." A miracle (by all ordinary laws of mechanics) happens in the atom every time a ray of light is projected or absorbed. We are dealing with realities so great that a deep sense of them may easily take in its stride what would be called a physical miracle.

None the less, the writer can only say that the spiritual truths do not lead on in his case to belief in these physical wonders, because they add nothing. They do not make Jesus more divine. They are irrelevant. They might be associated with a personality of any sort. Their tendency is to emphasise his divinity in that negative way spoken of above—that he was so much the more divine by being so much less a man like ourselves. Also there is nothing repugnant to the writer in the thought of Christ coming into the world by the way of human fatherhood. Rather, on the contrary, insistence on the Virgin Birth seems to condemn the inherent conditions of life as unclean, and to be a serious, almost fatal, going back on the great truth of the Incarnation which it is

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seeking to assert. Nor is it repugnant to think of Jesus' body passing back to the earth, and his dust mingling with the material substance of the world and the race of men he loved and identified himself with and died for.

The Third Son

Perhaps it may be allowed to sum up this chapter—the drama of Christ—in a form built on to that great allegory of life which Jesus himself gave us as his utmost endeavour to make obstinate men understand God's order. In the parable of the Prodigal Son we are given, as was earlier said, a picture of the world as Jesus saw it, and as we still can see it. The two sons are mankind. In them is displayed the two main driving forces behind all the multitudinous business of life—duty and joy. All the life that hums about us, city and theatreland, London and Brighton, work days and holidays, has something behind it that corresponds either to the elder son or the younger—actually mingled in all of us, of course, but in the parable separately personified. And over all is God. The world is His home. Men are His children. But somehow He is remote and unreckoned with. Each son goes his own way and his Father lets him do it. But, because of this, life is not right. The seeking of joy and colour and adventure turns to selfish indulgence and ends in misery. Duty, that should be most glorious, bearing the burden and carrying on the work of the world, becomes hard, unlovely drudgery. Something wrong whichever

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way we look—so Jesus saw the world, and might still see it.

But the parable isn't all the story. It is not complete. There should be a third son in it. In all the old stories there was a third son. Have we not some instinct, going back to childhood and folk-tales, that a story with only two sons is incomplete?

There is a third son, but he is not in the story, because he is telling it; he is not in the picture because it is seen through his eyes. The full story, with the third son in it, was not told but lived.

The third son would be all that the others failed to be, perfect son, perfect brother. We might expect, following the shape of stories, that in return he would be treated with harsh injustice. And so, as a matter of fact, some of the old hard dogmas did represent, for all practical purposes, God's dealing with Christ. But in the real story his union with the father was perfect. He was not like the Duty son, who had never really asked anything of life, never possessed his possessions, never found out that his father was saying, "All that I have is thine." And he was not like the Joy son, who was hungry for all life had to give but didn't know how to get hold of it. Jesus said, "All things are delivered unto me of the Father."

To his brothers he was the perfect brother. To the elder sons he tried to express what God wanted to give them; he tried to turn their gloomy service into happy sonship. He tried to make the Pharisees expand their natures to joy and

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love and freedom. To the younger sons he was still nearer. He pitied their illusionment and their disillusionment.

So it actually was in the story that Christ lived, just as we should expect it to be in the ideal story. But, further, what must his destiny be? To ask is to be faced at once with the inevasible answer, the answer of old dim mythologies, the answer of the great seers: In such a world as this the Beloved Son must suffer and die. And so we look upon the very heart of sadness and tragedy. It is tragic to have seen one of the sons taking the road that makes him dead and lost to the Father; it is tragic that the wages of sin is death. But if the wages of love is death! That is the essence of all sadness. All that tragic sense of life which is the background of so much sublime human utterance is gathered to a head in this: that the beloved son is crucified by sin and lies extinguished in death.

But think again of the parable of human life in this world, as Jesus told it, and remember that somehow it ends in joy. And so does the living story. The same exultant words which become almost unbearably bright and glorious as Jesus reiterates them to close his parable are the very Easter message to which the drama of his life leads up and on which it closes: "This, thy brother, was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found."

Is there any religion, is there any interpretation of this our life and the world in which it

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is set, visible and invisible, to be compared with the Christ-gospel and the Christ-life, that make truth and beauty and goodness and love happy in the sunlight for those who are children of their Father which is in heaven, and then go down into all our dark of pain and sin and death, and leave us only at the breaking of a new dawn.

NOTES

Christ and Miraculous Power.

The general question of miracle has not been raised in the text, but the attitude towards it must have been fairly discernible. Miracles as such (*i.e.*, marvels) not merely don't help as evidence, they obscure the evidence and divert the attention from it. They would distract us and distort our moral valuation of Jesus and the impression on us of his drama and destiny. They are completely inconsistent with the way of witness and appeal chosen by Jesus and faithfully followed by him. Held up as wonders they are an unbearable cheapening and falsifying of the portrait the Gospels otherwise give us. Not the least of the sins against him and his witness is that men, mistakenly seeking to honour him, should have done this thing against his own will. They have put us in danger of gaping at a wonder-worker and calling him a god, instead of being humbly and heart-

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brokenly moved, and passionately and gloriously responsive to divine purity and truth and grace and invincible love, and the revelation of the infinite and eternal God Himself which comes to us through them.

This applies especially to what are called the Nature Miracles. We don't *want* to believe that Jesus did such things. Our faith would strive against our reason, if necessary, to that end. Fortunately reason is on the side of our faith. It is easy to understand how some tales, such as those of the feeding of the multitudes, would grow as they were handed down, and, by an inveterate human tendency, would come to have all sorts of material details asseverated. Others, such as turning the water into wine, or finding the shekel in the fish's mouth, are simply Arabian Nights inventions. Masses of legendary material of this type would be discarded when the Gospels took their present form, and again when the canon of the New Testament was drawn up.

On the other hand it is certain that Jesus healed sick people, especially those with psychic disorders. We can readily believe nowadays that a strong personal influence can be used in this way. Since it is a power that man can possess, we should even expect that it *would* be an attribute of a full and perfect personality, especially of one not only clear and harmonious, but intensely actuated by compassion and love. To that extent Jesus' power to heal may be taken as evidential. It is what we should expect. It is a by-product which fits

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in with and verifies our impression of him. But it is a line of evidence which must be carefully subordinated. By itself it proves nothing in the realm of goodness and truth. Indeed some degree of such a power is rather often found in individuals whose moral quality is below the average.

A comment that might be made on this view of the whole matter is that it accepts miracles as long as they are not miraculous. That comment would define the position accurately. As long as "miracles" (1) are not held up to create awe and extract submission and homage, and (2) do not involve superhuman powers, they can fit into our portrait of Jesus. That his powers were exceptional in degree is more than credible; and that he would use every power to the utmost to help men is certain. So far "miracles" can be accepted. But the two conditions that have been laid down exclude precisely what makes a miracle miraculous. We personally would want to make these conditions, for the sake of what we value most in Jesus; but we have not only our own impression to go by; we have his own explicit word on these two points. (1) He repeatedly forbade the noising abroad of some cure; he dreaded the possibility of impressing men merely by marvels; if that had ever been a temptation he had put it behind him before he began his ministry. (2) He repeatedly told his followers that any one of them could do what he did. Against these, other actions and sayings may

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be adduced which seems to show an absolutely contradictory attitude. Having to choose between them, we can only say it is in the highest degree unlikely that the former sayings would ever have been invented by the authors of the Gospels, whereas it is all too human to revel in the astonishment caused by the wonder-worker, and incidentally make Jesus seem to exploit it, and to heighten the marvellous, and put a claim for superhuman power on the lips which had disowned it.

Atonement.

Taking "atonement" in its large and literal sense, try to find meanings for the word apart from the Christian usage.

Those who are specially susceptible to music are sometimes transported by it out of time and place and individuality. Music, on its highest planes, in some vein of majesty or mystery or sweetness, may chance to elicit, and breathlessly sustain for a little while, a resonance on which all things are in accord, and merge in one eternal order.

Most frequently the sense of atonement comes over a man through his relation to the world of Nature. It may be rapturous, or it may have just a clear singing quality of joyous harmony. Richard Jefferies, in *The Story of my Heart*, tells of moments that came to him sometimes on a certain little hill, when, with his face buried in the grass, he knew a speechless ecstasy of communion with Nature. In one of Algernon Blackwood's books a

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man and some children, crouched on a lawn, imagine more and more intensely until they feel themselves to be daisies, part of it all. On a wave of feeling that draws from great sources common to all life, we may be swept by the sense of mystic kinship with nature. Love-songs are full of it :

Ilka bird sang o' its luve,
And sae did I o' mine.

Fishing up a trout stream in the hills, sometimes a peculiar and most intimate absorption into the wild and fair motherhood of the Earth can come over one. All the more, perhaps, because one is not consciously admiring, or even thinking of, scenery, still less self-consciously so, like tourists come for the purpose. Rather, by indulging some remnant of the hunting-instinct, even in so mild and sophisticated a way, one is sunk to a more primitive childhood, one is inside the window, not looking through it.

To talk of these experiences of atonement may be bringing you, for the first time, in sight of what is meant by the word. But don't fail to note how fragmentary and limited the atonement is, or what special conditions are attached to it. When we know it through music or other art, we have to describe it as being "transported"; that is to say we are lifted out of the ordinary consciousness of life; there is a suspension of action, even of thought, and very often a reluctance and unfitness to return to them. When it comes as union with Nature, sometimes it is at a bursting moment

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of sunshine and song, and in that case, at the first shadow within or without, the spell is broken. Where is the Motherhood of Nature when her child is hurt ? Now the banks and braes of bonny Doon extort the cry :

How can ye blume sae fair !
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu' o' care !

There is an agonising discord now between this little breath of the human spirit, suffering, perplexed, solitary, protesting, and the whole order of things about it, which comprehends not, cares not. Or sometimes the sense of kinship comes in such a way that we describe ourselves as sinking or melting into it—words which suggest the finding of a common level beneath personality or manhood. It is a kinship which we find, face to the ground, down among the daisies and the creatures. It may be exquisite and sweet, but it comes, mind and conscience forgot, and all the flickering, upward-straining flame by virtue of which we are men burning low. It is not an atonement we aspire to, but one to which we relax.

Man, from the most ancient times, has known these broken chords of harmony, these underlying rhythms ; but they do not make the world his home. What he seeks is an atonement found in waking, not in dreaming, in walking the highway of life, not in turning aside from it ; an atonement whose harmony will still throb perfect, perhaps

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most perfect, at the point of pain, our own pain, or the burden of others' pain which we bear ; and an atonement which is attained at the utmost reach of that in him which sees and knows and loves and wills, not one he is leaving more and more behind. There is no Motherhood of Earth for that need, only the possibility of finding at the heart of all this strange universe a Fatherhood of his spirit. That is *the* Atonement. It is what men have found through Christ and his Cross.

The Unitarian Position.

It is found that some ask, what is the difference between what has been said about the divinity of Christ in this last chapter and the Unitarian view of Jesus ? We haven't much sympathy with a question of this type if it comes from mere dread of a label. Anyone who is in earnest about this business of finding out his beliefs ought not to be thinking of how others would classify them. But, since the question may arise out of a desire to get one's own position clearer by understanding the issue on which men have diverged, this can be said :

The distinctive feature of the Unitarian position is a denial. There is nothing distinctive in its assertion that God is One. There is nothing distinctive in its assertion that Jesus was a man. The most orthodox Christianity makes these assertions equally strongly. The point of divergence is its denial of God in Jesus. Now if that denial means all that it says it is serious. Not to

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meet and know God in Jesus is to miss the crowning Christian experience. To maintain that the oneness of God excludes the possibility of knowing Him by different channels is an immense impoverishment of the Christian view of the world. In so far as the Unitarian diverges on this real issue he has blotted out much and gained nothing. All the strength of his emphasis on monotheism the Trinitarian has too, and has in an even higher degree, since he not only says, God is One, but brings our whole world into that oneness—faces the facts, and gathers up all the aspects in which we can apprehend God, and then says, God is One. By virtue of this the Trinitarian is more Unitarian than the Unitarian.

But it is possible that much Unitarianism has originated, not out of divergence over the real issue, but out of reaction against the falsification of it, the demand to believe that Jesus was not a man. It is doubtful if any movement can be actually, as well as nominally, founded on a negation. And in so far as Unitarianism stood for the manhood of Jesus it was reasserting a truth which orthodox Christianity had allowed to become undermined.

The writer is not sufficiently well versed in Unitarian history and doctrine to know how far this was the case, but undoubtedly it is often what people mean when they say they are moving towards a Unitarian position. It is a pity if they think a belief in what must in any case be one article of a Christian creed (that Jesus was human)

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must involve them in a reluctant denial of so much else. As was said in an earlier chapter, the idea of the Trinity seems to the writer to be, in its essence, one of the profoundest, truest and closest to life of all the notions formulated by Christian doctrine to express our sense of God.

The Living Christ.

The reader who sees the momentousness of the Easter faith for the Christian outlook (to possess it or miss it makes the difference between day and night, between pessimism and optimism for those who think things right out) may desire to have its nature, and the basis it rests on, more closely overhauled and analysed. There are three ways in which it can conceivably come into being for us :

(1) Through the conclusive fact of the Empty Tomb. After death Jesus was reanimated, left the tomb, and took up life again in the same physical body with the vital lesions it had suffered, and is either conceived as somewhere living in it still, or as having discarded it in some unknown way at some unknown time. It was impossible for men to doubt this without doubting the evidence of their sight, hearing and touch, and that evidence has been transmitted to us in such a way as to make it irresistible. That is to say, we regard ourselves as confronted with an entirely substantial and materialistic fact, fully attested. A fact of this kind lifts faith over the fence without any self-effort. It is independent of any knowledge or thought or feeling of ours about Jesus himself.

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As an attested occurrence it would be equally compelling for someone who knew nothing whatever about him, or how he had approached death. If we have known his personality and teaching, yet this comes superadded to them, a demonstration of another kind, so little continuous with them that it burst on the disciples as a sudden surprise. If we have been helped by what he was and said and did to see the truth and make ventures of faith and so to find a way through many of the perplexities and threats of life, yet now, against this one daunting and oppressive fact of death, we are helped in quite a different manner.

That is the position if the Easter truth is founded upon a material occurrence, and belief created, compelled, rather, in that way. And it so seriously de-spiritualises religious conviction on this central point (at the same time de-humanising it and making it more remote, a victory over death involving such a relation to matter seeming to have little to do with us and the terms we are on with the physical world) that we would question if any Christian really holds his faith resting on that basis. Many are so convinced that they do that they will say their whole house of faith would come tumbling down if this were withdrawn. They regard it as a foundation-stone. This one solid, definite piece of guaranteed fact they must have given before they can begin to build a faith about life and God and the eternity of spirit out of such unsubstantial stuff as love, goodness, beauty and all their valuation of Jesus.

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If it is useless to urge again that spiritual and moral convictions are their own guarantee, and, failing that, *can't* be guaranteed by material facts, the best way to help may be to set such people examining themselves more closely, when they will probably find that they are not actually using the fact of the Empty Tomb as they think they are; they are not holding it in a way that enables it to be used like that.

As the quickest line of realisation, let anyone take a piece of paper and write down in three or four sentences what Mary Magdalene saw and heard when she went to the Tomb. He will find at once that he has never clearly visualised it. He has four different accounts to go by, no two of which are in agreement, he finds, as soon as he tries to state the main facts of what happened. We do not suggest this exercise as a wanton attempt to break up anyone's foundation-stone. It is an effort to show him that he has never been using it as such. If he had, it would have been clear-cut, solid, four-square. Its whole function would have involved that. But it has no sharp and definite lines for him at all, and *he has never missed them*. The truth is that he has begun from a drive and need to believe in Christ's victory over death. All that really mattered for him is that it should be in some way declared. It is all that has mattered for the body of Christians from the beginning, including those who compiled the New Testament and set the four Gospel-accounts side by side without turning a hair. What he thought

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was his foundation-stone really comes in at the top of the edifice, away up in the sky. The solid part that is taking the strain is faith, is a spiritual valuation of Jesus. If he believes a material fact it is not one that proves, but one that follows. We could venture to say that no living faith is actually dependent on it, or at the mercy of its substantiality.

(2) Over against this purely materialistic ground of belief can be set the purely spiritual one, the nature of which has pretty well emerged in the text and in the above discussion. To reduce it to the plainest terms, it is the conviction that Christ lives because we cannot conceive of what he was being overcome of death. This directly relates the Resurrection to that which revealed the divine in Jesus—his grace and truth and love and all his personality—and is a culminating valuation of them. The first ground we considered was all of sight and not at all of faith; this is the direct opposite, all of faith and none of sight. For that reason it is more intangible to deal with; it may appear weaker in statement; in those who hold it its force will fluctuate, as all human faith has its ebb and flow; and it is not so simple a matter to communicate it from one to another. But the moral and religious worth of a belief in the Resurrection will be proportional to the extent to which this conviction enters into it.

(3) But these two alternatives do not exhaust the possibilities. In particular, neither of them quite fits or covers the first appearance of belief in

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the Risen Christ. In its first appearance that belief was not based on sight, for it arose only among those who had known Jesus most closely and had received the deepest impression of his quality (or, in the case of the one great exception, in a man who happened to be in a specially responsive state to all that Jesus stood for). Also, as far as we can judge from the narrative, it was not born all in a moment, on Easter Day, as if it had been a mere matter of someone seeing with the senses. It appeared in its quickening power, transforming the situation, weeks later, after a period of doubt and meditation and prayer. Yet, on the other hand, when it did appear, it was with a sudden rush and definiteness not quite like the climbing of faith into a region of certainty. Some other factor entered in. It was the factor of vision, of mystical experience. We are told so, in the earliest first-hand accounts we have. The earliest books of the New Testament are Paul's. His Christianity began from a mystical experience. Whether the appearance of Christ to him was an objective one or not, no one thinks of it as having material substance, perceptible to the ordinary senses. It was not seen by those who accompanied him. (Their share in the incident is vague. In one account they saw a light but heard no voice; in another they heard a voice but saw no man. Pretty clearly they were influenced through Paul's emotion.) And Paul, at the early date of his writing, classes the other known appearances of the living Christ to Peter and other

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apostles in with his own, as if they had the same character.

What are we to make of this ground of conviction? It partakes of the character both of sight and faith. Like the material evidence of the senses it is sudden and compelling, and seems to take the strain and responsibility off one's own judgment. But unlike sight it is very far from being unrelated to what has been going on in the percipient's own mind and conscience. The relation may not be obvious; so much so that the experience may come like a bolt from the blue. But the relation exists down in the unconscious. Such visions don't come at random to anyone, as the Empty Tomb might have been there to convince any random spectators who happened to be on the spot. They come just to those who are already on the road to this conviction by the way of pure faith. The violent opposition which Paul was manifesting is no exception to this rule; a psychologist would diagnose it at once as the symptom of an inward struggle between attraction and resistance.

There is, then, this third ground of belief, which is not divorced from spiritual judgment, but is like a sudden precipitation of it, giving it probably a definiteness and an unfluctuating permanence that it could not otherwise have had. It is important because, almost certainly, it is at the root of the first outbursting belief in the Resurrection as we find it in the New Testament; and also because there is no reason why it should

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not be operating now as much as ever it did; and, in cases known to the writer, it has so operated; there are many men and women who believe that Christ lives because in vision they have seen and heard him. There are one or two things to be said about it.

One question will be at once asked: "Are these appearances objective or subjective?" That is to say, are they evolved by the seer's own mind, or are they presented to it from outside? It is not possible to settle this. Those who have such experiences will generally tend to believe them objective; those who have not had them will almost inevitably tend to explain them as subjective. And further than that it is not possible to get. But really the difference is not so vital as it might seem. If we think far enough, if we get close enough to the mind of God, the difference disappears. The use of our own powers of perceiving, judging, believing is one way God has given us of reaching the truth. We have no right to think that the truth so reached is less real, less absolute than a truth presented ready-made by God to some spiritual faculty of sight. When the former process (the subjective process) is accompanied by a leap of intuition which is without any conscious volition of our own; and when the latter process (the objective one) doesn't happen except to those who are already on the road of thinking, judging, deciding, the difference between them has vanished as far as the question of their validity is concerned. One who believes

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that God is showing man Christ by presenting a vision, can just as fully believe that God is showing man Christ by giving him powers able to visualise so vividly the truth.

Mystical experience of this sort is not common among Christians, as far as the writer is aware (he has never known it himself). It may be asked, Why should one be given such a lift to faith by something like sight, and not another? The reply is that there are different roads to the same end for different people. For one man part of the way may lie down in the unconscious, and he arrives apparently by a leap. For another all the way is in the light of his own full consciousness. There are no advantages without disadvantages. While mystical experience may bring joy and assurance when it comes, and leave a memory of them and a hope of their renewal, it will remain a thing apart from life and not affect the working outlook except in so far as the conscious process has led to it or has been afterwards filled in. And except in so far as that is done it will remain incommunicable. The vision of Christ which came to Paul, so momentous for the after-history of the whole world, could never have meant anything for us or other men apart from the moral struggle into which it broke, and the concentration of mind and heart and all his faculties of apprehension to which it led. It is exceedingly significant that Paul himself distrusted mystical experience, and, while knowing and acknowledging its exaltation and granting it a place, condemned it as

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unprofitable for the edification of a man's own life or that of his fellows whenever it was divorced from conscious perceiving, feeling and willing.

It follows that this third ground of belief cannot be set up in place of the first one which we rejected. If, as we believe, the New Testament appearances of the Risen Christ were mystical in character, whether objective or subjective, we cannot accept them in place of the Empty Tomb and a resurrection of the body, and use them as men have tried to use those material facts to save us from the need to perceive and feel and have faith for ourselves. We cannot rely on others having known in a way different from the way in which we can know. It may be said that the whole original impulse to belief in the living Christ came from these mystical appearances. But not from them as such. Only because, in the percipients, they were the outcome of intense thinking about Christ, and the stimulus to still more of it. Otherwise they would have meant no more for mankind than spiritualistic manifestations have ever meant.

There remains for us the way of spiritual valuation of Christ, and faith about the whole order in which he appears and in which we live. Mystical experience of our own may be super-added to the conviction that is born in such a way. But we cannot command it, cannot even seek it, except by giving ourselves more wholly to follow the daylight road which leads to the same end.

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